

Supplemental Notes:

*The Books
of
1 & 2 Kings*

*compiled
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Acknowledgments

These notes have been assembled from speaking notes and related materials which had been compiled from a number of classic and contemporary commentaries and other sources detailed in the bibliography, as well as other articles and publications of Koinonia House. While we have attempted to include relevant endnotes and other references, we apologize for any errors or oversights.

The complete recordings of the sessions, as well as supporting diagrams, maps, etc., are also available in various audiovisual formats from the publisher.

Audio Listing

1 Kings 1 - 2

David's strength declines; David's charge to Solomon; Adonijah's plot and execution; Abiathar is removed from the priesthood; Joab's execution; Benaiah made chief captain, and Zadok high priest; Shimei is executed.

1 Kings 3 - 4

Solomon's treaty with Pharaoh; Solomon's sacrifice and prayer for wisdom; Solomon's prayer answered.

1 Kings 5 - 8

Solomon prepares to build the Temple; The Ark is brought in and the Shekinah-glory fills the Temple; Solomon's prayer of dedication.

1 Kings 9 - 11

King Hiram and Solomon exchange gifts; Queen of Sheba visits Solomon; Solomon Forsakes God; God sternly rebukes Solomon and tells him that the kingdom will be taken away; Solomon dies.

1 Kings 12 - 14

Israel Rebels; Ahijah's Prophecy.

1 Kings 15 - 16

Abijam and Asa; Kings of Israel.

1 Kings 17 - 19

Contest on Mount Carmel; Elijah slays the prophets Baal; Elijah flees from Jezebel; Elijah is feed by God in the wilderness; Elijah casts his mantel on Elisha.

1 Kings 20 - 22

Ahab's Aramean adversary; Ahab's crimes against Naboth; Ahab's death; Jehoshaphat's good reign in Judah; the beginning of Ahaziah's evil reign in Israel.

Audio Listing

2 Kings 1 - 3

Fire from Heaven protects Elijah from Ahaziah; Translation of Elijah; Miracles of Elisha

2 Kings 4 - 7

Naaman the Syrian; Elisha and the Syrians; The famine; Special Intelligence Insight.

2 Kings 8 - 10

Jehoram's evil reign in Judah; Ahaziah's evil reign in Judah; Jehu's evil reign in Israel.

2 Kings 11 - 13

Athaliah's evil reign in Judah; Joash's good reign in Judah; Jehoahaz's evil reign in Israel; Jehoash's evil reign in Israel.

2 Kings 14 - 16

Amaziah's good reign in Judah; Jeroboam II's evil reign in Israel; Azariah's good reign in Judah; Zechariah's evil reign in Israel; Shallum's evil reign in Israel; Menahem's evil reign in Israel; Pekahiah's evil reign in Israel. Pekah's evil reign in Israel; Jotham's good reign in Judah; Ahaz's evil reign in Judah.

2 Kings 17 - 20

Captivity of Israel by Assyria; Hoshea's evil reign in Israel; Israel's Captivity; Captivity of Judah by Babylon; Hezekiah's good reign.

2 Kings 21 - 23

Manasseh's evil reign; Amon's evil reign; Josiah's good reign; Jehoahaz's evil reign; Jehoikim's evil reign.

2 Kings 24 - 25

Babylonian Captivity of Judah; Supplemental Topics.

Session 1 1 Kings 1 - 2 Introduction

The Books of 1 and 2 Kings were so named because they record and interpret the reigns of all the kings of Israel and Judah except Saul. [David's last days are mentioned (1 Kgs 1:1 - 2:12) but the events in most of his reign are recorded in 2 Sam 2 - 24 and 1 Chr 11 - 29.]

In the Hebrew Old Testament, 1 and 2 Kings were one book and were regarded as a continuation of the historical narrative begun in 1 and 2 Samuel. The Septuagint divided Kings into the two parts that constitute 1 and 2 Kings in English Bibles, though the Septuagint calls those two books "3 and 4 Kingdoms" (and calls 1 and 2 Samuel "1 and 2 Kingdoms"). The title "Kings" came from Jerome's Latin translation (the Vulgate) which was made about six centuries after the Septuagint; Jerome called the two books "The Book of the Kings."

1 and 2 Kings provide a record of Israel's history from the beginning of the movement to place Solomon on David's throne through the end of the reign of Zedekiah, Judah's last king. Zedekiah ruled until the surviving Southern Kingdom was taken captive and Babylonian governors were placed in charge of affairs in Palestine.

Three major periods of Israel's history can be distinguished in Kings:

- a) **the united monarchy** (during which time Israel and Judah remained united under Solomon as they had been under Saul and David);
- b) **the divided monarchy** (from the rebellion of Israel against the rulership of Judean kings until Israel was carried off into captivity by the Assyrians); and
- c) **the surviving kingdom** (the record of Judah's affairs from the deportation of Israel to Judah's own defeat and exile by the Babylonians).

1 and 2 Kings were not divided as they are because a natural break occurs in the narrative, but because the large scroll of 1 and 2 Kings needed to be divided into two smaller, more easily manageable units. The result was two books that are almost equal in length. 2 Chronicles records the history of almost the same period as 1 and 2 Kings. (First Chronicles includes the genealogies leading up to David [Chapters 1-9], Saul's death [Chapter 10], and David's reign and death [Chapters 11-29].)

The purposes and emphases of these two histories differ significantly. The kings of *Judah* were of more interest to the author of Chronicles whereas both the Israelite and Judean monarchs occupied the interest of the author of 1 and 2 Kings. The Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles emphasize especially the priestly elements in the nation's history, such as the temple and worship, while 1 and 2 Kings give attention to the royal and prophetic elements. In 2 Chronicles the kings of Judah after David are evaluated in reference to David and the worship of Yahweh; in 1 and 2 Kings the rulers of both kingdoms are evaluated in reference to the Mosaic Law.

Chronology

The major problem facing students of 1 and 2 Kings is the chronology of the rulers, especially those of Judah. In some cases the answer can be found in a co-regency or vice-regency, periods during which two kings ruled.

In other cases the problem can be solved after one establishes when a king began counting the years of his reign. Judah and Israel used two different methods to determine when a king's reign began, and each nation switched methods at least once during the period of history recorded in 1 and 2 Kings. A third factor complicates the chronological problems further. Judah and Israel began their calendar years at different times.

Though exact dates are a problem, several different chronologies, worked out by conservative scholars, harmonize the narratives. In most cases these systems vary from each other by only one or two years.

The major dates for this period are:

931 B.C.—the division of the kingdom;

722 B.C.—the fall of Israel;

586 B.C.—the fall of Judah.

Geopolitical Horizon

In David's day Egypt's power had waned and Assyria was weak; hence there were impotent nations on both of Israel's frontier. However, Assyria soon awakened under Tiglath-pileser III (also called Pul, 2 Kgs 15:19; 745 B.C.). In 721 B.C. Samaria fell under the attack of Shalmaneser and Sargon. Later, under Sennacherib, Assyria invaded Judah and took many cities but failed to take Jerusalem because of the rear-guard threat of Egypt. Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal extended Assyrian hegemony to Egypt. In Josiah's time Pharaoh Necho went up to help Assyria against Babylon at Carchemish, but the two allies were defeated. Shortly, the victorious Nebuchadnezzar invaded Palestine, and on his third attack against Jerusalem, plundered and destroyed the city, carrying the people off to final captivity (586 B.C.).

1 Kings 1 Solomon's Ascension to the Throne

For 33 years David aggressively guided God's united people to greatness, forging a powerful empire. As David grew older, his sons disputed over the succession. But God had revealed to David that He had chosen Solomon to succeed him (see 1 Chr 22:9–10). David had shared this revelation with Bathsheba, Solomon's mother (1 Kgs 1:13, 17). He had even announced it to the nation (1 Chr 22:5; 29:1). Still, Solomon was not the oldest of David's living sons. There were older brothers who understandably disputed his right to the throne. Finally, one of David's older surviving sons, Adonijah, took steps to gain the succession. Nathan the prophet and Bathsheba insisted that David act. David did. He made Solomon co-regent.

- 1] Now king David was old *and* stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat.

David's many misfortunes at the hand of Saul before he came to the throne, and his forty-year reign over Israel, had left their indelible impressions upon him. Yet, before death overtook him, the warrior-poet-king reached the age of seventy years (2 Sam 5:4), which his own writings had marked out as the ultimate bound of life. The final blow that hastened the old man's death was Absalom's rebellion (2 Sam 15:1 ff). The covers that David's servants placed over him to keep him warm were like sheets and blankets, not articles of clothing. That a virgin should be sought was reasonable since an unmarried young woman would likely be in vigorous health, free from domestic responsibilities, and able to wait on David continually as his needs might demand.

- 2] Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin: and let her stand before the king, and let her cherish him, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat.

His inability to retain body heat led his attendants to search for a way to keep David warm. Their decision to provide a young woman who could keep him warm by lying next to him in bed and also serve as his nurse was in harmony with medical customs of that day. Josephus (A.D. 37-ca. 100), and Galen (ca. A.D. 130-200), a Greek physician, refer to this therapeutic practice which continued into the Middle Ages.

- 3] So they sought for a fair damsel throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found Abishag a Shunammite, and brought her to the king.

An attractive young woman was found in the town of Shunem, seven miles northwest of Nazareth, near the foot of Mount Tabor in the tribal

territory of Issachar. Abishag's beauty is attested to by the attraction of Adonijah, David's son, to her (2:17). And if Abishag were the Shulammitte (an alternate spelling of Shunammite) who captivated Solomon's heart (Song 6:13) her beauty apparently attracted many men.

- 4] And the damsel *was* very fair, and cherished the king, and ministered to him: but the king knew her not.

The fact that David had no intimate (i.e., sexual) relations with his nurse Abishag shows that this was not her function and that David was very weak. The king's inability to withstand sexual temptation while in good health resulted in his committing adultery with Bathsheba. He also had had a harem. But now, due to poor health and advanced age, his vigor was gone. Another reason Abishag is introduced by name in the narrative is because she figured significantly in Adonijah's attempt to capture the throne:

Adonijah's Plot (1:5-53)

- 5] Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him.

The description of Adonijah's decision to seek the throne strongly suggests a selfish motive: he put himself forward and said determinedly, "I will be king." Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith, was David's fourth son (2 Sam 3:4) and probably the eldest of his brothers living at that time. Perhaps Adonijah believed that as the eldest living son of David he had right to the throne. But if so, he ignored the theological implications of God's having already chosen Solomon, David's son through Bath-sheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam 12:24). Adonijah's preparation of chariots, horses, and 50 men to run ahead of him was probably intended to give him prestige in the people's eyes; it also helped ready his coup d'état against his father.

- 6] And his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so? and he also *was a very goodly man*; and *his mother* bare him after Absalom.

More light is shed on Adonijah by recording that he was a spoiled, undisciplined young man who had apparently received much admiration for his good looks ("he was a very goodly man") more than for the quality of his character. From this it may be inferred that Adonijah was allowed to go unchecked and undisciplined. Evidently Adonijah expected that his plot would succeed more because he was a popular figure than because he was a capable person championing a worthy cause.

- 7] And he conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah, and with Abiathar the priest: and they following Adonijah helped *him*.

Among David's staff both Joab and Abiathar forsook the king and sided with Adonijah. Joab was David's nephew, a son of his half sister, Zeruiah (1 Chr 2:16), the brother of Abishai and Asahel. He had served the king faithfully for many years—since David was pursued by Saul. As chief-in-command of David's army, he proved himself a brilliant military strategist, valiant in battle, though not above cruelty and actual treachery in certain instances. His chief military accomplishments were the capturing of Jerusalem and the siege of Rabbah, of the Ammonites.

However, Joab was brutal and used his position to murder at least three important men:

- Abner (2 Sam 3:22-30), Saul's commander-in-chief, and
- Amasa (2 Sam 20:8-10), who had slain Joab's brother fairly in battle.
- When Absalom led a coup against David, Joab executed Absalom contrary to the king's orders (2 Sam 18:5-15).

Because he had needlessly shed the blood of Abner and Amasa, Solomon ordered Benaiah to put him to death. At his own request Joab was slain beside the altar of God in the Tabernacle, where he had taken refuge. Abiathar was the only priest who had escaped the brutal vengeance Saul took on the priestly order at Nob for extending aid to David (1 Sam 22:18-20). After fleeing to David, he had become spiritual adviser and friend to the fugitive warrior. Up to this point Abiathar had remained true to the king personally, but then he joined in the conspiracy of Adonijah against Solomon. His subsequent penalty was not the execution he deserved, but expulsion from the priesthood by Solomon.

- 8] But Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and Nathan the prophet, and Shimei, and Rei, and the mighty men which *belonged* to David, were not with Adonijah.

Zadok the priest had joined David after Saul was killed in battle (1 Chr 12:28). He had supported David and had served as his spy during Absalom's rebellion, and acted as the king's spy (2 Sam 15:24-29; 17:15). Benaiah (cf. 1 Kgs 1:10) was one of David's mightiest warriors and commanders (2 Sam 8:18; 20:23; 23:20-23); he had been appointed captain of the king's body-guard (2 Sam 8:18; 20:23; 1 Chr 18:17), and was regarded by Joab as a rival. Nathan the prophet (cf. 1 Kgs 1:10) brought the word of the Lord to the king on at least two occasions (2 Sam 7:4-17; 12:1-14). If Shimei is the same man who cursed David (2 Sam 16:5-13) and was later forgiven by him (2 Sam 19:16-23), then Shimei's loyalty now to the king is understandable.

- 9] And Adonijah slew sheep and oxen and fat cattle by the stone of Zoheleth, which *is* by Enrogel, and called all his brethren the king's sons, and all the men of Judah the king's servants:

Adonijah held a feast and tried to persuade others to join his cause. His sacrifice was evidently a feast rather than a religious offering. “The Stone of Zoheleth” (“the Serpent’s Stone, RSV), is identified on the steep rocky corner that overlooks the plain where the Valley of Hinnom joins the Kidron Valley just south of Mount Zion where the City of David was situated.

“En Rogel” (“Fountain of the treaders,” or “the foot fountain”) is one of the two main springs in the Kidron Valley that supplied water for Jerusalem. Here the fullers cleaned garments by treading them in the waters of the spring. This site has been identified as the “Well of Job” (more likely Well of Joab), situated below the junction of the Kidron Valley with the valley of Hinnom, 550 feet below Mount Zion. Adonijah invited to his feast all the important people in the government who were not firmly allied with his father or his brother Solomon, who was David’s and God’s chosen prince. Adonijah’s actions have been duplicated by aspiring politicians for centuries.

- 10] But Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, and the mighty men, and Solomon his brother, he called not.

In that culture, if Nathan and David’s other supporters had been invited and eaten with Adonijah, he would have been bound to protect them, having extended them the fellowship of such a meal. Benaiah, son of Jehoiada the high priest (1 Chr 27:5), native of Kabzeel, head of David’s police force, valiant in battle against man and beast, remained faithful to Solomon. Hence he was not summoned in the rebellion of Adonijah. Solomon, son of David through Bathsheba the legitimate and God appointed heir to the throne, naturally was not summoned to Adonijah’s feast.

Nathan’s Plan (1:11-14)

- 11] Wherefore Nathan spake unto Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, saying, Hast thou not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith doth reign, and David our lord knoweth *it* not?

Nathan the prophet first appears in Scripture to announce to David that he must defer building the Temple (2 Sam 7). Later he appears to reprove David for his double sin of murder and adultery in the matter of Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam 12; Ps 51). Nathan now secured the kingdom to David’s son Solomon by exposing Adonijah’s machinations to the proper authorities, in this case Bathsheba. The fact that Nathan took the initiative in countering Adonijah’s rebellion suggests that God may have moved His prophet to this action as He had done previously (2 Sam 12:1). Bathsheba enjoyed David’s favor from the first moment he saw her on to the end

of his life. Adonijah had become king in the sense that for all practical purposes he was the popular choice, though he had not been anointed or crowned. Nathan’s choice of words seems designed to shock Bathsheba into realizing the seriousness of the situation. Apparently David was ignorant of the plot until now (v. 18).

- 12] Now therefore come, let me, I pray thee, give thee counsel, that thou mayest save thine own life, and the life of thy son Solomon.

Nathan was probably not overstating the danger to Bathsheba and Solomon by telling her that she needed to take steps to save her own life and Solomon’s. Adonijah’s not inviting them to share food at his feast freed him from the duty of an oriental host to protect their lives.

- 13] Go and get thee in unto king David, and say unto him, Didst not thou, my lord, O king, swear unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne? why then doth Adonijah reign?

David’s promise to Bathsheba that he would make Solomon king after him, to which Nathan referred, does not seem to be recorded in Scripture. But in view of what Nathan told Bathsheba to say here, obviously David had made such a promise (cf. 1 Chr 22:8-10).

- 14] Behold, while thou yet talkest there with the king, I also will come in after thee, and confirm thy words.

That is, “I will appear in order to verify your words before David, to show that you are not a victim of fright or imagination.” Nathan made sure that David’s promise would be heard by two witnesses, Bathsheba and himself. Under Mosaic Law at least two witnesses were required to make a charge stick. The news of Adonijah’s rebellion now fell upon David’s ears, apparently for the first time. If David was becoming forgetful in his old age a second witness (in this case Nathan) would also confirm that the king had indeed made such a pledge.

- 15] And Bathsheba went in unto the king into the chamber: and the king was very old; and Abishag the Shunammite ministered unto the king.

Evidently David was confined to his bed (vv. 15, 47).

- 16] And Bathsheba bowed, and did obeisance unto the king. And the king said, What wouldest thou?

Bathsheba treated David like the king he was by bowing and kneeling before him. She intended to call on him to act as he must in view of the situation. David invited her to explain what she wanted.

- 17] And she said unto him, My lord, thou swarest by the LORD thy God unto thine handmaid, *saying*, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne.
- 18] And now, behold, Adonijah reigneth; and now, my lord the king, thou knowest *it* not:
- 19] And he hath slain oxen and fat cattle and sheep in abundance, and hath called all the sons of the king, and Abiathar the priest, and Joab the captain of the host: but Solomon thy servant hath he not called.

Bathsheba stated the facts about Adonijah's uprising without exaggeration or embellishment.

- 20] And thou, my lord, O king, the eyes of all Israel *are* upon thee, that thou shouldest tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him.
- 21] Otherwise it shall come to pass, when my lord the king shall sleep with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon shall be counted offenders.

She called on David to announce publicly who his successor would be by appealing to his sense of duty (v. 20), and his love for her and Solomon (v. 21). She pointed out that she and Solomon would be treated as political criminals by Adonijah. Customarily in the ancient Near East a new monarch would purge his political enemies when he came to power, as Solomon did later (2:13-46). [The abandonment of this practice in current politics raises profound questions of accountability in our system of government...]

- 22] And, lo, while she yet talked with the king, Nathan the prophet also came in.

True to his promise, Nathan put in an appearance to support Bathsheba's account of Adonijah's rebellion, which otherwise might have appeared to the monarch as an exaggerated report.

- 23] And they told the king, saying, Behold Nathan the prophet. And when he was come in before the king, he bowed himself before the king with his face to the ground.

Nathan sought an audience with the king while Bathsheba was talking with David. He was admitted and reported the same facts Bathsheba had announced, with a bit more detail as would have been appropriate for a man in his position.

- 24] And Nathan said, My lord, O king, hast thou said, Adonijah shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne?
- 25] For he is gone down this day, and hath slain oxen and fat cattle and sheep in abundance, and hath called all the king's sons, and the captains of the host, and Abiathar the priest; and, behold, they eat and drink before him, and say, God save king Adonijah.

- 26] But me, *even* me thy servant, and Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and thy servant Solomon, hath he not called.

Nathan's statement that Adonijah's feast was taking place at that very moment would have encouraged David to act at once.

- 27] Is this thing done by my lord the king, and thou hast not shewed *it* unto thy servant, who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?

Nathan knew David had promised Bathsheba that Solomon would succeed him (v. 13), but apparently the prophet had learned this from others, not from David. Rather than reminding David of his promise regarding Solomon which might have annoyed the king who may not have wanted many people to know of his choice, Nathan diplomatically asked David if he had planned the present circumstances. The prophet left the initiative with David rather than putting him on the defensive.

- 28] Then king David answered and said, Call me Bathsheba. And she came into the king's presence, and stood before the king.
- 29] And the king sware, and said, *As* the LORD liveth, that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress,

The king invoked the sacred name of Yahweh, the living God who had delivered him from every one of his troubles. All debate was thus ruled out of order. "As the LORD liveth" meant that David's intended action was as certain to take place as God's very existence. [Those words occur frequently in the Old Testament including *14 times* in 1 and 2 Kings (1 Kgs 1:29; 2:24; 17:1, 12; 18:10, 15; 22:14; 2 Kgs 2:2, 4, 6; 3:14; 4:30; 5:16, 20).]

- 30] Even as I sware unto thee by the LORD God of Israel, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead; even so will I certainly do this day.

David could not more forcefully have guaranteed that he would indeed do what he now said he would do. The God who had delivered David would now, through David, "deliver" Bathsheba and her son. David repeated his promise that Solomon, Bathsheba's son, would succeed him as king and sit on the throne that God had promised to bless.

- 31] Then Bathsheba bowed with *her* face to the earth, and did reverence to the king, and said, Let my lord king David live for ever.

"Let my lord the king live forever" (cf. v. 34), is a common expression found often in Scripture signifying a desire that God would bless a monarch by granting him long life. It is a complimentary wish; God had promised to bless the righteous with length of days. These words

therefore implied that the king had acted righteously and was worthy of God's blessing.

David's Instructions

- 32] And king David said, Call me Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada. And they came before the king.

David's plans skillfully defused the rebellion which was building just south of Jerusalem at the spring of En Rogel (cf. v. 9). Zadok, Nathan, and Benaiah were the ranking priest, prophet, and soldier respectively (cf. v. 8), who had remained unallied with Adonijah. Their leadership in the events to follow would demonstrate to the general population that they were acting as the king's representatives.

- 33] The king also said unto them, Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon my son to ride upon mine own mule, and bring him down to Gihon:

The lord's servants were the Kerethites and the Pelethites (v. 38; cf. 2 Sam 8:18), David's special military guards under Benaiah (2 Sam 23:22-23). They protected the king, his family, and his city. David told them to place Solomon on a mule and lead him through Jerusalem to the place of anointing. Kings rode on mules in the ancient Near East, symbolizing their role as the people's servants. The people would understand that Solomon's riding on a mule implied his kingship. The mule specified by David was to be his own personal animal. Perhaps the people would have recognized that mule by its trappings and concluded that David had given Solomon permission to ride it as his designated successor.

The officials were to lead Solomon down to the spring of Gihon. Two springs provided most of the water for Jerusalem: the En Rogel spring southeast of Jerusalem not far from the city wall where Adonijah was feasting his guests (cf. v. 9), and the Gihon spring about one-half mile north and directly east of Jerusalem also outside the city wall. On that day two processions, one by rebels and one by the king's men, were going to two neighboring springs.

- 34] And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel: and blow ye with the trumpet, and say, God save king Solomon.

Both Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet were to anoint Solomon. There was no prophet in Adonijah's camp. Nathan's presence symbolized the divine choice of Solomon as king in a way that Zadok's presence alone could not. The blast of the trumpets announced to the people that Solomon had now legally taken the throne of his father, even before the latter's death.

Every king of Israel was anointed. The ceremony symbolized the coming of the Spirit of God on His chosen leader through pouring oil on his head.

- 35] Then ye shall come up after him, that he may come and sit upon my throne; for he shall be king in my stead: and I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah.

The leaders had been instructed to return up Mount Zion to the city of David and place Solomon on David's throne. This would be the ultimate proof of his election. Solomon was to commence his rule at that moment; the official seating on the throne was to be perceived not as simply a symbolic act. David clearly explained that he himself by the authority of his kingly office had appointed Solomon ruler over Israel and Judah effective immediately. Israel and Judah were distinguished (cf. 4:20, 25), probably because 1 Kings was written after the kingdom was divided in 931 B.C. (or because a rift was already evident between the northern and southern parts of the kingdom (cf. 2 Sam 19:41-20:2).)

- 36] And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the king, and said, Amen: the LORD God of my lord the king say so *too*.
37] As the LORD hath been with my lord the king, even so be he with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord king David.
38] So Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, went down, and caused Solomon to ride upon king David's mule, and brought him to Gihon.

The Kerethites and the Pelethites were the royal bodyguard troops under Benaiah's personal, veteran command (cf. the "lord's [David's] servants," v. 33; 2 Sam 8:18). "Gihon," located east of the City of David in the Valley of Kidron just outside the city wall, was the main source of water for Jerusalem at this time.

- 39] And Zadok the priest took an horn of oil out of the tabernacle, and anointed Solomon. And they blew the trumpet; and all the people said, God save king Solomon.

Zadok took the horn (perhaps an animal's horn used as a container) of oil that was used to anoint kings and priests from the sacred tent in Jerusalem and carried it to Gihon. Perhaps this tent, set up by David (1 Chr 15:1), was similar to the Mosaic tabernacle. The olive oil symbolized the presence and power of God.

- 40] And all the people came up after him, and the people piped with pipes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth rent with the sound of them.

A great throng of people followed the procession and witnessed the anointing. This was a glorious day in the history of Israel and the people celebrated enthusiastically, so much so that the ground shook.

- 41] And Adonijah and all the guests that *were* with him heard *it* as they had made an end of eating. And when Joab heard the sound of the trumpet, he said, Wherefore *is this* noise of the city being in an uproar?

Adonijah's party was feasting only a half mile south of Gihon. They heard the celebration easily. But it was the blowing of the trumpet, the sign that an official function was taking place, that roused Joab to inquire about all the noise in the city.

- 42] And while he yet spake, behold, Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest came: and Adonijah said unto him, Come in; for thou *art* a valiant man, and bringest good tidings.

Abiathar's son Jonathan had been in the city, and arriving at the feast just then, reported what was going on. Adonijah's optimism and complete ignorance of the plot to undercut his rebellion can be seen in his greeting of Jonathan.

- 43] And Jonathan answered and said to Adonijah, Verily our lord king David hath made Solomon king.
44] And the king hath sent with him Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, and they have caused him to ride upon the king's mule:
45] And Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king in Gihon: and they are come up from thence rejoicing, so that the city rang again. This *is* the noise that ye have heard.
46] And also Solomon sitteth on the throne of the kingdom.
47] And moreover the king's servants came to bless our lord king David, saying, God make the name of Solomon better than thy name, and make his throne greater than thy throne. And the king bowed himself upon the bed.
48] And also thus said the king, Blessed *be* the LORD God of Israel, which hath given *one* to sit on my throne this day, mine eyes even seeing *it*.

Jonathan had apparently penetrated the palace or at least obtained information from within it since he reported to Adonijah what David had said in his bedroom. Characteristically David praised God for one more blessing: allowing him to live long enough to see his successor on his throne.

- 49] And all the guests that *were* with Adonijah were afraid, and rose up, and went every man his way.

Adonijah's guests scattered as far from the traitor and as fast as they could so they would not be linked with him and dealt with as they felt surely he would be. They feared, with reason, that they would be regarded as traitors against the state, and be summarily dealt with.

- 50] And Adonijah feared because of Solomon, and arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar.

- 51] And it was told Solomon, saying, Behold, Adonijah feareth king Solomon: for, lo, he hath caught hold on the horns of the altar, saying, Let king Solomon swear unto me to day that he will not slay his servant with the sword.

Terror at this prospect drove Adonijah to the tabernacle where he claimed refuge by grasping the horns on the brazen altar in the tabernacle courtyard. Such a practice was common in Israel and in other neighboring nations (cf., e.g., Ex 21:13-14). The symbolism of taking hold of the altar's horns seems to have meant that as God had been gracious to man, as seen in accepting man's offerings to atone for his sins, so one man should be gracious to another man who had offended him.

- 52] And Solomon said, If he will shew himself a worthy man, there shall not an hair of him fall to the earth: but if wickedness shall be found in him, he shall die.

Solomon could have had Adonijah removed from the tabernacle and executed, but instead showed mercy. Solomon followed this pattern of graciousness throughout his reign. The new king simply asked for a promise from his half brother that he would not rebel again but would show himself to be a worthy, loyal subject.

- 53] So king Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and bowed himself to king Solomon: and Solomon said unto him, Go to thine house.

Adonijah promised and Solomon sent him home. But soon Adonijah conspired again and lost his life as a result (2:13-25).

1 Kings 2 Last Words and Death of David

- 1] Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son, saying,

The charge recorded here was given to Solomon just before his death and is different from the farewell address delivered in public some time before (1Chr 29:28). It is introduced with great solemnity.

- 2] I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man;
3] And keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself:
4] That the LORD may continue his word which he spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee (said he) a man on the throne of Israel.

This is a reference to the promise made to David of the sovereignty being vested perpetually in his lineage (2 Sam 7:11–16), which was confirmed to Solomon afterwards (see 1 Kgs 9:5), and repeated with reference to its spiritual meaning long after (Jer 33:17). Solomon was thus encouraged to be strong to keep the Word of the Lord. He should show himself to be a man by being brave to stand for the right and against the wrong. He should observe what the LORD requires in the sense of obeying Yahweh. What the Lord requires is to walk in His ways, namely, to keep His statutes, (decrees, ordinances), commandments, judgments, testimonies. These four words refer to the different kinds of precepts in the Mosaic Law. Obedience to the propositional revelation of God would guarantee success, David said. God’s blessing depended on His people’s obedience to the Law of Moses.

- 5] Moreover thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, *and* what he did to the two captains of the hosts of Israel, unto Abner the son of Ner, and unto Amasa the son of Jether, whom he slew, and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that *was* about his loins, and in his shoes that *were* on his feet.

The insolent and imperious conduct of that general had not only been deeply offensive to the feelings (2 Sam 18:5–15; 19:5–7), but calculated to bring reproach on the character, to injure the prospects, and endanger the throne of David. Passing over the injuries committed directly against himself, David dwelt with strong feelings on the base assassination of Abner and Amasa.

- 6] Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace.

David’s instruction to put Joab to death did not manifest a vindictive spirit or a cowardly refusal to execute his commander himself. Joab had murdered two commanders Abner and Amasa: (cf. comments on 1:7). David described the blood of these two innocent victims as permanently staining Joab’s belt and sandals; the blood clung to him to demonstrate his guilt. In mercy David had not executed the punishment that Joab’s actions deserved, probably because Joab had shown David much loyalty and had served him well. But justice had to be done and Solomon had to do it. Joab had been living on borrowed time; soon he had to pay for his crimes.

- 7] But shew kindness unto the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be of those that eat at thy table: for so they came to me when I fled because of Absalom thy brother.

Barzillai of Gilead (east of the Jordan River) had sustained David and his men when they were fleeing from Absalom (2 Sam 19:31-39). David

charged Solomon to sustain Barzillai’s sons at his table as Barzillai and his sons had provided sustenance for David in the wilderness. David wanted Barzillai’s sons to reap what their father had sown.

- 8] And, behold, *thou hast* with thee Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite of Bahurim, which cursed me with a grievous curse in the day when I went to Mahanaim: but he came down to meet me at Jordan, and I swore to him by the LORD, saying, I will not put thee to death with the sword.
9] Now therefore hold him not guiltless: for thou *art* a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him; but his hoar head bring thou down to the grave with blood.

Shimei, a Benjamite, had not only cursed David but, more seriously, had threatened David’s life (2 Sam 16:11). Evidently David had reason to believe that Shimei would again strike at his life. Since Shimei, as a Benjamite, stemmed from the neighborhood of the erstwhile king Saul, David feared that this man, once his protective custody was withdrawn, would again strike at the throne. Moreover, before actual penalty was imposed, Solomon gave Shimei a reprieve conditioned on obedience, but later the Benjamite proved faithless and, like Adonijah, sealed his own doom (vv.36–46).

- 10] So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David.

The picturesque phrase “slept with his fathers” beautifully describes David’s death and suggests that his activity did not cease forever. Indeed, the bodies of all believers who die simply “rest” until they are resurrected to live with God and serve Him eternally. The City of David (cf. 3:1; 8:1; 9:24; 11:27; 15:8, 24; 22:50) is Jerusalem which David captured from the Jebusites and made his capital. In his day Jerusalem was quite small and occupied a peninsula of high ground bounded on the east, south, and west by valleys. Solomon enlarged the city to the north later and other kings expanded it even farther.

- 11] And the days that David reigned over Israel *were* forty years: seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem.

David (1011-971 B.C.) was about 70 years old when he died (2 Sam 5:4). He is remarkable in many respects: he was a warrior, poet, musician, military genius, administrator, and man of God. He experienced both outstanding success and crushing failure. He extended the borders and influence of his nation greatly. He was greatly loved and greatly hated during his lifetime. But perhaps his most significant characteristic was his heart for God.

- 12] Then sat Solomon upon the throne of David his father; and his kingdom was established greatly.

Adonijah's Execution

- 13] And Adonijah the son of Haggith came to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon. And she said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably.

Adonijah had not abandoned his hope of becoming king (cf. 1:5). But to take the throne he would have to dispose of Solomon. The plot that he conceived was clever. He began his maneuvering by approaching Bathsheba, the queen mother (but not his own mother, who was Haggith; cf. 2 Sam 3:4), through whom he hoped to receive a favorable decision from Solomon. In view of Adonijah's previous plotting Bathsheba initially expressed caution.

- 14] He said moreover, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And she said, Say on.
15] And he said, Thou knowest that the kingdom was mine, and *that* all Israel set their faces on me, that I should reign: howbeit the kingdom is turned about, and is become my brother's: for it was his from the LORD.

Adonijah may have believed that all Israel looked to him as their king, but this hardly seems to have been the case; Adonijah's wishful dreaming had convinced him of this. The throne had never been his. His saying that the present state of events had "come from the LORD" seems to have been a pious ploy designed to convince Bathsheba that he had accepted Solomon's anointing as God's will and had submitted to it. There is no evidence that Adonijah was ever sincerely interested in what the Lord wanted.

- 16] And now I ask one petition of thee, deny me not. And she said unto him, Say on.

But there is much evidence that he was interested in what *Adonijah* wanted! His pious profession along with his apparent acquiescence to Solomon's anointing persuaded Bathsheba that Adonijah had no lingering aspirations to become king. So she gave him permission to proceed with his proposal.

- 17] And he said, Speak, I pray thee, unto Solomon the king, (for he will not say thee nay,) that he give me Abishag the Shunammite to wife.
18] And Bathsheba said, Well; I will speak for thee unto the king.

Bathsheba apparently interpreted Adonijah's request for Abishag (cf. 1:3-4) as simply the desire of a handsome young man for the hand of a beautiful young woman. Bathsheba probably relished the thought of having a part as a matchmaker.

- 19] Bathsheba therefore went unto king Solomon, to speak unto him for Adonijah. And the king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king's mother; and she sat on his right hand.

- 20] Then she said, I desire one small petition of thee; *I pray thee*, say me not nay. And the king said unto her, Ask on, my mother: for I will not say thee nay.

Solomon respectfully greeted his mother by standing up to meet her and bowing to her when she entered the throne room. He gave her the seat of honor at his right hand so she could converse comfortably with him. She had only one small request; at least she perceived it as small. Assuming it was a small request, Solomon agreed to grant it.

- 21] And she said, Let Abishag the Shunammite be given to Adonijah thy brother to wife.
22] And king Solomon answered and said unto his mother, And why dost thou ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? ask for him the kingdom also; for he is mine elder brother; even for him, and for Abiathar the priest, and for Joab the son of Zeruiah.

However, Solomon knew immediately that her proposal had far-reaching consequences that would threaten his throne. So he refused to agree to it. Abishag had become a member of King David's harem. Even though David never had sexual relations with her, Abishag's presence in the harem entitled her to part of David's inheritance. In the people's eyes she had been David's concubine. ["Among the Israelites, just as with the ancient Persians (Herod. iii. 68), taking possession of the harem of a deceased king was equivalent to an establishment of the claim to the throne" C.F. Keil, "The Books of the Kings," in *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, 3:32.]

Bathsheba may have thought that because Abishag was not really one of David's concubines this would be no problem. But Solomon in his wisdom realized that the people would regard Abishag as a concubine and therefore would interpret Adonijah's marriage to her as a claim to the throne. Also since Adonijah was older (v. 22) than Solomon (cf. 2 Sam. 3:4 with 2 Sam 5:13-14) the people would assume that he had more right to be king than Solomon. The people generally did not recognize that God's purposes in election frequently violated the natural order of primogeniture. (For example, God chose the younger brother in His selection of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and many others.)

- 23] Then king Solomon sware by the LORD, saying, God do so to me, and more also, if Adonijah have not spoken this word against his own life.
24] Now therefore, *as* the LORD liveth, which hath established me, and set me on the throne of David my father, and who hath made me an house, as he promised, Adonijah shall be put to death this day.

Solomon's perception of Adonijah's wicked intent led him to reply with much indignation to his mother. He had not executed his brother for his

attempted coup before David died; Solomon had shown him mercy (1 Kgs 1:52-53). But Adonijah was still plotting against the Lord and His anointed. Solomon was not only just in having Adonijah put to death, but he also acted as a good steward of the kingdom that had been committed to him by God (as He promised).

- 25] And king Solomon sent by the hand of Benaiah the son of Jehoiada; and he fell upon him that he died.

Abiathar's Dismissal

- 26] And unto Abiathar the priest said the king, Get thee to Anathoth, unto thine own fields; for thou *art* worthy of death: but I will not at this time put thee to death, because thou barest the ark of the Lord GOD before David my father, and because thou hast been afflicted in all wherein my father was afflicted.

Abiathar could have been justly executed by Solomon for conspiracy. But because Abiathar was a priest of Yahweh who had carried the ark (served as high priest) during David's lifetime and because he had faithfully shared all of David's hardships, Solomon merely removed him from his office and restricted him to his hometown of Anathoth three miles northeast of Jerusalem. (Centuries later Jeremiah was born in Anathoth, Jer 1:1.)

- 27] So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the LORD; that he might fulfil the word of the LORD, which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh.

The author of 1 and 2 Kings noted that this act of Solomon fulfilled God's prophecy that Eli's line of priests, of which Abiathar was a member. In this brief statement one of the 1 and 2 Kings' author's purposes can be seen clearly: to demonstrate the faithfulness of God to His Word.

Joab's Execution

- 28] Then tidings came to Joab: for Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom. And Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD, and caught hold on the horns of the altar.

The news that reached Joab was evidently what had befallen Adonijah and Abiathar (vv. 23-27), his fellow conspirators. Joab had been head of the army under David (2 Sam 8:16). Now Joab, like Adonijah, sought the protection of the horns of the brazen altar in the courtyard of the Tabernacle (cf. 1 Kgs 1:50). This was a place of refuge for those whose lives were in danger. The Mosaic Law provided refuge there for all but murderers (Ex 21:13-14). Why did Joab seek refuge there since he was a murderer? Perhaps he thought that Solomon was after him only because of

his part in Adonijah's attempted coup and that the king did not know of or care about his murdering Abner and Amasa. But it was for all these sins that Solomon sought Joab.

- 29] And it was told king Solomon that Joab was fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD; and, behold, *he is* by the altar. Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, Go, fall upon him.
30] And Benaiah came to the tabernacle of the LORD, and said unto him, Thus saith the king, Come forth. And he said, Nay; but I will die here. And Benaiah brought the king word again, saying, Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me.

Solomon probably did not want to defile the tabernacle by shedding human blood there so he told Benaiah to order Joab to come out. But the commander refused. Joab would not let go of the altar's horns. Solomon ordered that he be treated like the murderer he was and struck down on the spot.

- 31] And the king said unto him, Do as he hath said, and fall upon him, and bury him; that thou mayest take away the innocent blood, which Joab shed, from me, and from the house of my father.
32] And the LORD shall return his blood upon his own head, who fell upon two men more righteous and better than he, and slew them with the sword, my father David not knowing *thereof, to wit*, Abner the son of Ner, captain of the host of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, captain of the host of Judah.
33] Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab, and upon the head of his seed for ever: but upon David, and upon his seed, and upon his house, and upon his throne, shall there be peace for ever from the LORD.

For his murders Joab was executed without mercy. As long as Joab remained alive, David's house (dynasty) bore some responsibility for Joab's action since he had murdered Abner and Amasa (cf. 2 Sam 3:22-30; 20:8-10) in connection with his official duties. Solomon (like David before him, 1 Kings 2:5-6) wanted to remove any obstacle to God's blessing on his reign and to identify Joab's guilt with his own house alone. The old general was actually not dishonored after all: To be buried on one's own property was a mark of distinction, as in the case of Samuel the prophet (1 Sam 25:1) and other outstanding personalities. Joab's dwelling was east of Bethlehem, in the wilderness of Judea.

- 34] So Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up, and fell upon him, and slew him: and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness.
35] And the king put Benaiah the son of Jehoiada in his room over the host: and Zadok the priest did the king put in the room of Abiathar.

After the replacement of Joab by Benaiah, Zadok succeeded Abiathar. The appointment of Zadok was fraught with serious consequences, for from then on, the priesthood was subject to the political maneuvers of the state.

Shimei's Execution

36] And the king sent and called for Shimei, and said unto him, Build thee an house in Jerusalem, and dwell there, and go not forth thence any whither.

Shimei must have been a dangerous man. He was treated as such by both David and Solomon, though what is recorded of him here seems on the surface to be of minor importance. When David fled Jerusalem, being pursued by Absalom, Shimei verbally and physically attacked David and his officials. David's men recognized the danger Shimei posed for the king and asked David's permission to kill him then and there (2 Sam 16:5-13). But David did not allow this. He did not pardon Shimei's traitorous actions, but postponed Shimei's execution probably because of all that he was facing at the moment in view of Absalom's rebellion. Shimei was from the same clan as Saul's family (2 Sam 16:5).

Solomon summoned Shimei and passed judgment on him: he was restricted to living in Jerusalem; the city would be his prison. In particular Shimei was not to cross the Kidron Valley just east of Jerusalem, which divided the tribe of Judah from the tribe of Benjamin. Shimei was from the latter tribe. He was thus forbidden to return to his own tribe. If Shimei crossed the Kidron he would probably head home to stir up insurrection among the Benjamites. Solomon told Shimei that he would be executed if he disobeyed Solomon's orders. Shimei understood his sentence, agreed to abide by it, and did so for a long time (three years, 1 Kgs 2:39).

- 37] For it shall be, *that* on the day thou goest out, and passest over the brook Kidron, thou shalt know for certain that thou shalt surely die: thy blood shall be upon thine own head.
- 38] And Shimei said unto the king, The saying *is* good: as my lord the king hath said, so will thy servant do. And Shimei dwelt in Jerusalem many days.
- 39] And it came to pass at the end of three years, that two of the servants of Shimei ran away unto Achish son of Maachah king of Gath. And they told Shimei, saying, Behold, thy servants *be* in Gath.
- 40] And Shimei arose, and saddled his ass, and went to Gath to Achish to seek his servants: and Shimei went, and brought his servants from Gath.
- 41] And it was told Solomon that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem to Gath, and was come again.
- 42] And the king sent and called for Shimei, and said unto him, Did I not make thee to swear by the LORD, and protested unto thee, saying, Know for a certain, on the day thou goest out, and walkest abroad any whither, that thou shalt surely die? and thou saidst unto me, The word *that* I have heard *is* good.
- 43] Why then hast thou not kept the oath of the LORD, and the commandment that I have charged thee with?
- 44] The king said moreover to Shimei, Thou knowest all the wickedness which thine heart is privy to, that thou didst to David my father: therefore the LORD shall

return thy wickedness upon thine own head;

- 45] And king Solomon *shall be* blessed, and the throne of David shall be established before the LORD for ever.
- 46] So the king commanded Benaiah the son of Jehoiada; which went out, and fell upon him, that he died. And the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon.

Solomon then recognized that Shimei's attitude had not changed. Because Shimei had violated the terms of his sentence Solomon had every right to execute the punishment he had graciously postponed. Like Adonijah, Shimei had not changed. Solomon reviewed the terms of Shimei's sentence with him to justify his action (vv. 42-43). Solomon's chief concern was the security of David's throne (v. 45); this apparently had been David's concern also with respect to Shimei. As David had commanded (vv. 8-9), Solomon put Shimei to death. But Solomon's prior mercy in dealing with Shimei (vv. 36-37) absolved the king from any charge of being vindictive or unfair. In all Solomon's dealings with his political enemies—men who conspired against the will of God during David's reign—the young king's mercy and wisdom stand out.

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) Compare the chronological coverage of 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, and 1 & 2 Chronicles with overlapping time lines. (Cf. charts in *Learn the Bible in 24 Hours*, et al.)
- 2) Which Dynasty was Pharaoh Necho from? Why did King Josiah take up arms against him?
- 3) Where else does Abishag show up in the Old Testament literature?
- 4) How was Abiathar's expulsion a fulfillment of prophecy?
- 5) Highlight the major events in Nathan's career relative to the Throne of David.
- 6) How might Shimei prove to be a threat to the stability of the kingdom?

Discussion Questions

("Where two people agree, one is redundant.")

- 1) Why did Adonijah feel the throne was attainable?
- 2) Why did Joab and Abiathar join Adonijah in his aspirations to the throne?
- 3) Discuss the career and failings of Joab as David's military commander.

- 4) Explore the failures of David *as a father*.
- 5) Review the actions of Solomon regarding Adonijah, Joab, Abiathar, and Shimei. Were they too severe? Or were they appropriate? Why?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Study the political machinations of Pharaoh Necho, the Assyrians, and Babylon, as background to 2 Chronicles 35. How does this impact the possible whereabouts of the Ark of Covenant finding its way to Elephantine Island, Tana Qirqos Island, and ultimately to Axum in Ethiopia?

Preparation for Next Session:

Read Chapters 3 & 4.

Session 2 1 Kings 3, 4

The wisdom of Solomon, already evident in the record of his dealings with his political enemies, is reemphasized in chapter 3.

1 Kings 3 Solomon's Personal Wisdom

- 1] And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the LORD, and the wall of Jerusalem round about.

This note by the author may be out of chronological sequence with the other events of Solomon's life. It is added here as an important historical fact and a portent of things to come. Solomon made a peace treaty with Pharaoh king of Egypt and sealed it by marrying his daughter. The exact identity of this Pharaoh is a matter of controversy. He was either Siamon, the last Pharaoh of the 21st Dynasty, or the first of the 22nd. Archaeology may yet add more light on this. Solomon was not as careful about marrying non-Israelites as he should have been. But this union did result in peace with Israel's neighbor to the southwest who was weak during Solomon's reign. Solomon housed this bride in Jerusalem. After he finished several building projects including his palace, the temple, and other buildings (cf. 7:2-7), he prepared a special house (a palace) for her (cf. 7:8).

- 2] Only the people sacrificed in high places, because there was no house built unto the name of the LORD, until those days.
- 3] And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places.

During the period of the Judges the Israelites adopted the Canaanite custom of offering sacrifices at high places. These were on hilltops and other elevations. The pagan Canaanites felt that the closer they got to heaven the more likely was the possibility that their prayers and offerings would reach their gods. They had been used by the patriarchs, and had become so universal among the heathen that they were almost identified with idolatry. They were prohibited in the law (Lev 17:3, 4; Deut 12:13, 14; Jer 7:31; Ezek 6:3, 4; Hos 10:8). But, so long as the tabernacle was migratory and the means for the national worship were merely provisional, the worship on those high places apparently was tolerated. Hence, as accounting for their continuance, it is expressly stated (1Kgs 3:2) that God had not yet chosen a permanent and exclusive place for his worship. The temple refers to Solomon's temple, not the tabernacle. In general, Solomon was careful to follow in David's godly footsteps, thus demonstrating his love for Yahweh.

- 4] And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that *was* the great high place: a thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar.
- 5] In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.

Evidently that very night the LORD revealed Himself to the king in a dream. Such revelations were not that uncommon in ancient Israel (cf. Gen 28:10-15; 37:5-7; etc.). God invited Solomon to ask for whatever he wanted. [There seems to be a cause-and-effect relationship between Solomon's loving generosity in making his offering to the Lord and God's loving generosity in making him this offer.]

- 6] And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as *it is* this day.
- 7] And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and *I am but* a little child: I know not *how* to go out or come in.

The king acknowledged his own immaturity and need for God's wisdom: Solomon was about 20 years old when he took the throne. In calling himself a child, he was admitting his inexperience (cf. 1 Chr 22:5; 29:1).

- 8] And thy servant *is* in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.

- 9] Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?

Solomon was concerned that he would be able to function effectively as the vice-regent of Yahweh. His responsibility as the leader and judge of God's people weighed heavily on him. So he requested a discerning heart (lit., "a hearing heart") tuned to the voice of God so he could lead Israel as God would want the nation to be led. He acknowledged his dependence on God by referring to himself as God's servant.

- 10] And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.
11] And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment;

Solomon placed the good of God's people above his personal peace or prosperity and above any desire to become a powerful and popular king. His values were in the right place from God's perspective. Therefore God promised to give him what he requested. He would possess a wise heart (v. 12) and be able to discern and render fair judgments (v. 11).

- 12] Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.
13] And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.

Since Solomon sought what was most important God also promised to give him what was of secondary importance, riches and honor, to further enable him to govern God's people effectively. Solomon was to be the richest and most honored king of his day. The Wisdom literature of Solomon and post-Exilic days bears testimony to the high desirability of wisdom (Prov 8:11-36; Ecc 12:9-11).

- 14] And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days.
15] And Solomon awoke; and, behold, *it was* a dream. And he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and offered up burnt offerings, and offered peace offerings, and made a feast to all his servants.

Inspired by this revelation Solomon turned from the high place and proceeded to the divinely appointed place of worship, the tabernacle. He did not enter the most holy place; only the high priest could enter there once a year (Lev 16). But the king stood before the ark of the LORD's covenant, outside the tabernacle facing toward the ark. Burnt offerings expressed the complete dedication of oneself to God and fellowship offerings symbolized

the fellowship people can enjoy with God and with others through God's grace. Solomon's feast expressed his joy and gratitude to his court.

- 16] Then came there two women, *that were* harlots, unto the king, and stood before him.
This incident was undoubtedly included at this point to show that God had indeed given Solomon the wisdom He promised (cf. v. 12).
17] And the one woman said, O my lord, I and this woman dwell in one house; and I was delivered of a child with her in the house.
18] And it came to pass the third day after that I was delivered, that this woman was delivered also: and we *were* together; *there was* no stranger with us in the house, save we two in the house.
19] And this woman's child died in the night; because she overlaid it.
20] And she arose at midnight, and took my son from beside me, while thine handmaid slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom.
21] And when I rose in the morning to give my child suck, behold, it was dead: but when I had considered it in the morning, behold, it was not my son, which I did bear.
22] And the other woman said, Nay; but the living *is* my son, and the dead *is* thy son. And this said, No; but the dead *is* thy son, and the living *is* my son. Thus they spake before the king.

A dilemma which, of course, has become a classic.

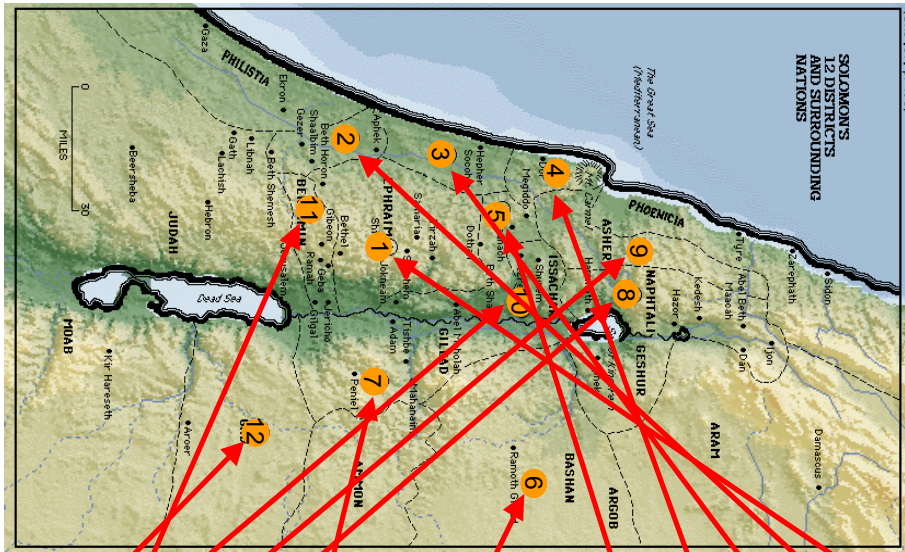
- 23] Then said the king, The one saith, This *is* my son that liveth, and thy son *is* the dead: and the other saith, Nay; but thy son *is* the dead, and my son *is* the living.
24] And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought a sword before the king.
25] And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other.
26] Then spake the woman whose the living child *was* unto the king, for her bowels yearned upon her son, and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, *but* divide *it*.
27] Then the king answered and said, Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she *is* the mother thereof.
28] And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God *was* in him, to do judgment.

1 Kings 4

Solomon's Political Administration

- 1] So king Solomon was king over all Israel.
2] And these *were* the princes which he had; Azariah the son of Zadok the priest,

Delegation of authority is a mark of wisdom. Solomon appointed 11 chief officials over his government. Three men are called priests: Azariah, Zadok, and Abiathar (v. 4). Azariah, a son of Zadok, was Zadok's grandson (cf. 1 Chr 6:8-9). ("Son" often means descendant.)



(BCE 1011 p. 496)

- 8 And these are their names: The son of Hur, in mount Ephraim:
- 9 The son of Dekar, in Makaz, and in Shaalvim, and Bethshemesh, and Elonbethanan:
- 10 The son of Heseid, in Aruboth; to him pertained Sochoh, and all the land of Hephher:
- 11 The son of Abiradab, in all the region of Dor; which had Taphath the daughter of Solomon to wife:
- 12 Baana the son of Ahilud; to him pertained Taanach and Megiddo, and all Bethshean, which is by Zartanah beneath Jezreel, from Bethshean to Abelmeholah, even unto the place that is beyond Jokneam:
- 13 The son of Geber, in Ramothgilead; to him pertained the towns of Jair the son of Manasseh, which are in Gilead; to him also pertained the region of Argob, which is in Bashan, threescore great cities with walls and brasen bars:
- 14 Ahiradab the son of Iddo had Mahanaim:
- 15 Ahimaaz was in Naphtali; he also took Basmath the daughter of Solomon to wife:
- 16 Baanah the son of Hushai was in Asher and in Aloth:
- 17 Jehoshaphat the son of Paruah, in Issachar:
- 18 Shimei the son of Elah, in Benjamin:
- 19 Geber the son of Uri was in the country of Gilead, in the country of Shion king of the Amorites, and of Og king of Bashan; and he was the only officer which was in the land.

3] Elihoreph and Ahiah, the sons of Shisha, scribes; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud, the recorder.

Elihoreph and Ahijah were secretaries or scribes. This was an important office; the scribes prepared royal edicts affecting trade, commerce, and military alliances and kept official records. Jehoshaphat was the recorder who maintained the records of all important daily affairs in the kingdom. Jehoshaphat had also served in this capacity under David (2 Sam 8: 16; 20:24).

4] And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the host: and Zadok and Abiathar were the priests:

Benaiah was commander in chief of the whole army. Zadok and Abiathar had served as co-high priests under David (2 Sam 15:35). But Abiathar had sided with Adonijah in the attempted coup so the priest was dismissed by Solomon (1 Kgs 2:20-27). Zadok continued as high priest (2:35). [Abiathar is listed here as one of Solomon's officials because even though he was fired from being high priest he retained the title and honor after he was deposed. Perhaps Azariah and Zadok then served together as Abiathar and Zadok had done previously.]

5] And Azariah the son of Nathan was over the officers: and Zabud the son of Nathan was principal officer, and the king's friend:

Two men are listed as sons of Nathan. They may have been the sons of one man or the sons of different Nathans. Azariah (not the Azariah in v. 2) was in charge of the 12 district officers named in verses 8-19. Zabud was of the priestly line and served as the king's personal adviser.

6] And Ahishar was over the household: and Adoniram the son of Abda was over the tribute.

Ahishar was in charge of the palace, perhaps overseeing the servants and other workers there, and Adoniram (cf. 5:14) supervised the forced labor, non-Israelites living in Israel who were conscripted to work for the king (cf. 5:13-14; 9:15, 21; 2 Chr 2:2; 8:8).

Solomon's District Governors (see map, opposite)

7] And Solomon had twelve officers over all Israel, which provided victuals for the king and his household: each man his month in a year made provision.

Solomon made each of his 12 district governors responsible to supply provisions for the royal household (and for his thousands of horses, v. 28), one governor for each month. These provisions were huge (cf. vv. 22-28). This work doubtless kept these men busy. Interestingly two of

the governors were sons-in-law of Solomon (vv. 11, 15). All 12 of them are mentioned only here in the Bible except for Ahimaaz, who possibly was a son of Zadok the priest (cf. 2 Sam 15:27). Judah, not included, was perhaps exempted by Solomon from the levy requirement.

- 8] And these *are* their names: The son of Hur, in mount Ephraim:
- 9] The son of Dekar, in Makaz, and in Shaalbim, and Bethshemesh, and Elonbethhanan:
- 10] The son of Heseb, in Aruboth; to him *pertained* Sochoh, and all the land of Hopher:
- 11] The son of Abinadab, in all the region of Dor; which had Taphath the daughter of Solomon to wife:
- 12] Baana the son of Ahilud; to him *pertained* Taanach and Megiddo, and all Bethshean, which *is* by Zartanah beneath Jezreel, from Bethshean to Abelmeholah, *even unto the place that is* beyond Jokneam:
- 13] The son of Geber, in Ramothgilead; to him *pertained* the towns of Jair the son of Manasseh, which *are* in Gilead; to him *also pertained* the region of Argob, which *is* in Bashan, threescore great cities with walls and brasen bars:
- 14] Ahinadab the son of Iddo *had* Mahanaim:
- 15] Ahimaaz *was* in Naphtali; he also took Basmath the daughter of Solomon to wife:
- 16] Baanah the son of Hushai *was* in Asher and in Aloth:
- 17] Jehoshaphat the son of Paruah, in Issachar:
- 18] Shimei the son of Elah, in Benjamin:
- 19] Geber the son of Uri *was* in the country of Gilead, *in* the country of Sihon king of the Amorites, and of Og king of Bashan; and *he was* the only officer which *was* in the land.
- 20] Judah and Israel *were* many, as the sand which *is* by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry.
- 21] And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life.

Solomon's domain stretched from the Euphrates River (cf. v. 24) on the E and N to the land of the Philistines on the W and Egypt to the SW. All of the smaller kingdoms in between had by this time become vassals to Solomon (Cf. 1 Kgs 4:24). It might seem impossible that with two such strong contending powers as Egypt to the south and Assyria to the north it would be possible to build so large an empire, but such was the case at the beginning of Solomon's reign. At this time, the kingdom of Egypt was ruled by the weak and inglorious 21st Dynasty; and the power of Assyria was in a state of decline. This does not mean that the Abrahamic Covenant was fulfilled in Solomon's day (Gen 15:18-20), for not all this territory was incorporated into the geographic boundaries of Israel; many of the subjected kingdoms retained their identity and territory but paid taxes (tribute) to Solomon. Israel's own geographic limits were "from Dan to Beersheba" (v.25).

- 22] And Solomon's provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour, and threescore measures of meal,

The ability of the nation to provide Solomon's daily provisions (cf. v. 7) testifies to its prosperity. Those provisions included 185 bushels of fine flour; 375 bushels of meal; 30 head of cattle, 100 sheep and goats, and wild meat (deer, gazelles, roebucks) and fowl (v.23).

- 23] Ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and an hundred sheep, beside harts, and roebucks, and fallowdeer, and fatted fowl.
- 24] For he had dominion over all *the region* on this side the river, from Tiphseh even to Azzah, over all the kings on this side the river: and he had peace on all sides round about him.

These provisions were made possible by the great geographical extent of the kingdom—from the town of Tiphseh in the north (that is, Thapsacus, a large and flourishing town on the west bank of the Euphrates, the name of which was derived from a celebrated ford near it, the lowest on that river) to Gaza on the southwestern extremity, not far from the Mediterranean (cf. v. 21).

- 25] And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.

Each man living under his own vine and fig tree (v. 25) is a figurative expression for peace and prosperity (cf. Micah 4:4; Zech 3:10). The vine and fig tree were both symbols of the nation Israel and pictured the Promised Land's agricultural abundance.

- 26] And Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen.

Solomon's numerous horses (12,000; cf. 2 Chr 1:14) and many chariots (1,400 according to 2 Chr 1:14) were kept in several locations (called "chariot cities" in 2 Chr 9:25; cf. 1 Kgs 9:19). Though the Hebrew here has 40,000 stalls (cf. NIV marg.), this may have been an error of a copyist in transcribing the text which read 4,000, the number in 2 Chr 9:25.

- 27] And those officers provided victual for king Solomon, and for all that came unto king Solomon's table, every man in his month: they lacked nothing.
- 28] Barley also and straw for the horses and dromedaries brought they unto the place where *the officers* were, every man according to his charge.

The horses and chariots, used for national defense, served as a strong deterrent to potential foreign aggressors. Barley and straw for all Solomon's horses was supplied daily by the district governors.

29] And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that *is* on the sea shore.

This additional information about Solomon's wisdom demonstrates God's faithfulness in blessing the king as He had promised (cf. 3:12; 5:12). "Largeness of heart" is from a Hebrew term meaning *breadth of mind*. His understanding was vast; today he might be described as a man of encyclopedic knowledge. Wisdom is the ability to live life successfully. While Solomon possessed this ability he did not always apply it to his own life. Thus the wisest man who ever lived (i.e., with the greatest wisdom) did not live as wisely as many others who preceded and followed him. Having insight into life does not guarantee that one will choose to do what is right. Solomon's great insight was his ability to see the core of issues (e.g., 3:16-27).

30] And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt.

31] For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about.

"...than Ethan"—or Jeduthun, of the family of Merari (1Chr 6:44). Heman—(1Chr 15:17–19)—the chief of the temple musicians and the king's seers (1Chr 25:5); (the other two are not known.) "...the sons of Mahol"—either another name for Zerah (1Chr 2:6); or taking it as a common noun, signifying a dance, a chorus, "the sons of Mahol" signify persons eminently skilled in poetry and music.

32] And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five.

By common consent the Wisdom literature contained in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes is traditionally ascribed to the pen (or penmen) of Solomon. (Psalms 72, 127, 132 are also his.) The literary production of the reigning son of David was little short of prodigious.

33] And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that *is* in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.

34] And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom.

The Era of Solomon

The years of Solomon's long reign seem to be years of growing glory for Israel. The traditional powers of the ancient world—the Egyptians and the Hittites—and the empires yet to appear—Assyria and Babylon—

were not aggressive during either David's or Solomon's rule. David had expanded Israel's sphere of influence by war. Solomon was a diplomat, who held what his father had gained. During Solomon's reign, Israel's wealth and power were unmatched.

Strength for Peace

One of Solomon's strategies for maintaining peace was to constantly strengthen Israel's military capacity. Like strategists in our day, Solomon wanted to deal with world problems through diplomacy, but he wanted to negotiate from a position of strength rather than weakness.

For a country to gain her ends by force she must be strong. For a country to gain her ends by diplomacy she must be twice as strong.

Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*

Solomon fortified key cities on the perimeter of Israel's territory and set up outer command posts to give early warning of possible enemy military buildups. In addition, Solomon developed a strong and mobile strike force, assembling some 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen, and building stables for 4,000 horses. Solomon's chariot cities have been excavated and indicate the extent of the large standing army the king maintained. This military readiness placed a heavy strain on the kingdom's financial resources. But throughout the years of Solomon's reign, Israel was at peace.

Diplomacy

David had won the respect of the great powers surrounding Israel. Solomon now moved to make alliances with them. His many marriages to foreign women were part of this diplomatic strategy; in that day such marriages were a normal way to seal an international alliance. Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter (1 Kgs 3:1) shows the place Israel had won in the ancient world, as Egypt was a major world power. Solomon also developed close ties with Hiram I, the Phoenician king of Tyre (ca. 978–944 B.C.). Again, marriage sealed the alliance. But trade between the two powers, with Tyre contributing her "cedars of Lebanon" and Israel providing wheat plus other foodstuffs, also bound them together. In addition, Solomon and Hiram jointly sponsored trade ventures that took ships representing Israel as far as India. This system of alliance and trade treaties was the key to Solomon's successful foreign relations program.

Economic Conditions

Solomon was as aggressive economically as his father had been militarily. He invested in land and sea trade. He developed Israel's natural resources,

setting up smelteries which excavation has shown brilliantly used prevailing winds to intensify the heat of the furnaces in which metals were refined. Solomon maintained a large court as well as a large army and built many public buildings. He also built the temple of the Lord, which his father had dreamed of and planned for. And that temple cost billions! While Solomon's sources of income were constantly being developed, his expenses still outgrew them. We are told that at one time he borrowed heavily from Hiram.

Solomon drew income from four major sources.

- **Taxation.** The country was divided into 12 districts (not along the old tribal lines), and the chief officer over each was primarily a tax collector. The bureaucratic demands grew so heavy that at Solomon's death the people cried out desperately for tax relief (12:3-4).
- **Trade.** Solomon's ships and caravans traveled to Africa, Arabia, and India, trading copper from his mines for many goods. He also became a middleman in selling military hardware, buying and selling chariots and horses for peoples to the north and south of Israel.
- **Labor conscriptions.** Solomon drafted laborers for his public works projects. At first the laborers were drawn from the foreign populations over which Israel ruled. Later, when more men were needed, he pressed Israelites into service as well. As such conscripts were expected to work for the government without pay, this was deeply resented.
- **Foreign tribute.** Income was also received from foreign countries. Some of this was annual tribute from subject states, while some was in the form of gifts from states desiring to remain on good terms with powerful Israel.

During Solomon's days Jerusalem became increasingly affluent. The wealth of the world flowed to Solomon's court and was reflected in the glory of the capital city. But bureaucracy grew as well. The nation's wealth was no longer based on the land and what it produced. Increasingly the government controlled the wealth of the land, and taxes drained wealth from the people and funneled expenditure through the central government. The glory was a superficial thing; prosperity was not for the people as much as it was at the expense of the people.

The Temple

Solomon's most massive project was the building of the temple at Jerusalem. The gold used in its construction was worth over \$2 1/2 billion—if gold were valued at only the old \$35 per ounce. And 10 times as much silver as gold had been gathered by David before construction began. The temple was

similar to the tabernacle in structure, but was approximately twice as large. Built of stone, and paneled over with cedar, with the whole inlaid with gold, the temple was a strikingly beautiful building.

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) Were "high places" the proper place for burning incense, etc.? Why?
- 2) What specific promises did God give Solomon in his dream?
- 3) Review the priesthood and devolution from the sons of Eli.
- 4) Sketch out the extent of Solomon's reign.

Discussion Questions

("Where two people agree, one is redundant.")

- 1) Was Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh proper? Why?
- 2) What does the incident with the two harlots tell you about Solomon? Can you give similar examples of this type of incident from contemporary events.

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Enumerate the occasions that God appeared or communicated with Solomon.
- 2) Prepare a map of Solomon's possessions and tributaries. Enumerate the outlying and adjacent relationships.
- 3) Make a list of writings in the Bible attributed to Solomon.

Preparation for Next Session:

Read Chapters 5 through 8.

Session 3 1 Kings 5 - 8

Solomon's Temple and Palace

Building preparations (chapter 5); Temple construction (chapter 6); Solomon's palace (chapter 7:1-12); The temple furnishings (chapter 7:13-51); The temple dedication (chapter 8).

1 Kings 5

Hiram's Treaty with Solomon

- 1] And Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants unto Solomon; for he had heard that they had anointed him king in the room of his father: for Hiram was ever a lover of David.

Tyre was an important port city on the Mediterranean Sea north of Israel. It was one of the chief cities of Phoenicia, one of Israel's friendly neighboring kingdoms. Hiram, king of Tyre, (c. 970–937 B.C.) had been an ally and friend of King David. After David had conquered the stronghold of Zion, he made a permanent treaty of peace with the king of Tyre. Hiram had assisted David in his public works by sending to Jerusalem laborers and cedar wood from the Lebanon Mountains (2 Sam 5:11; 2 Chr 2:3, 4). Hiram sent his envoys to Solomon to pay his respects to the new king, the son of his friend.

- 2] And Solomon sent to Hiram, saying,
3] Thou knowest how that David my father could not build an house unto the name of the LORD his God for the wars which were about him on every side, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet.
4] But now the LORD my God hath given me rest on every side, *so that there is* neither adversary nor evil occurrent.
5] And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build an house unto my name.

David had shared with his friend Hiram his desires to build a temple. But because of the wars David had to fight, he was not allowed to construct it. Now peace prevailed (cf. 4:24-25) and construction could begin. Solomon's assurance of peace would have encouraged Hiram to cooperate with his plans. His intention was to build the temple God Himself had approved.

- 6] Now therefore command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon; and my servants shall be with thy servants: and unto thee will I give hire for thy servants according to all that thou shalt appoint: for thou knowest that *there is* not among us any that can skill to hew timber like unto the Sidonians.

Solomon called on Hiram to give orders that his subjects provide materials and craftsmen for the project. While the western slopes of the Lebanon Mountains must have been extensively covered with cedars in Solomon's day, only a few hundred of these trees remain today. Having taken hundreds of years to grow, these trees were valuable for building purposes because of the beauty of the wood and its extreme bitterness, which repelled insects and worms, and therefore it did not decay as rapidly as other woods. Solomon offered to supply workers to assist Hiram's men in felling the trees and to pay the Sidonian laborers whatever Hiram considered a fair

wage. The Sidonians were indeed highly skilled in felling timber; doubtless Solomon's recognition of this ability impressed Hiram favorably. Sidon, another Phoenician city, was north of Tyre. Apparently Hiram hired workers from there.

- 7] And it came to pass, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly, and said, Blessed *be* the LORD this day, which hath given unto David a wise son over this great people.
8] And Hiram sent to Solomon, saying, I have considered the things which thou sentest to me for: *and* I will do all thy desire concerning timber of cedar, and concerning timber of fir.

Apparently Solomon's total message to Hiram (vv. 3-6) was not recorded by the author of 1 and 2 Kings since Hiram agreed to provide pine as well as cedar logs.

- 9] My servants shall bring *them* down from Lebanon unto the sea: and I will convey them by sea in floats unto the place that thou shalt appoint me, and will cause them to be discharged there, and thou shalt receive *them*: and thou shalt accomplish my desire, in giving food for my household.

The lumber would be carried from the forest to the sea, and from there it would be floated by rafts along the Mediterranean coast to a designated port of reception. However, Hiram wanted something in return: food for his royal household. Now Hiram guaranteed his continued aid and goodwill to Solomon by a trade agreement, stipulating that in exchange for Tyrian wood and stone, Solomon would furnish him with agricultural products (2 Chr 2:3ff.).

- 10] So Hiram gave Solomon cedar trees and fir trees *according to* all his desire.
11] And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand measures of wheat *for* food to his household, and twenty measures of pure oil: thus gave Solomon to Hiram year by year.

Solomon agreed to the arrangement and each year gave him 130,000 bushels of wheat and 20,000 baths (ca. 115,000 gallons) of olive oil. Barley and wine were also included (2 Chr 2:10). Hiram had a large household, which no doubt included his courtiers as well as family members. Apparently wheat and olive oil were not plentifully available in or near Tyre.

- 12] And the LORD gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him: and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and they two made a league together.

Due to Solomon's wise initiative (the LORD gave Solomon wisdom; cf. 1 Kgs 3:12, 28; 4:29) this treaty arrangement continued for many years and contributed to peaceful relations between the two kings. A tempo-

rary rift in the friendship occurred when Solomon turned twenty of the cities in Galilee over to Hiram in exchange for some large shipments of gold, and Hiram found the cities displeasing (9:11-14). However, the rift was subsequently healed, and the two kings engaged in profitable trade with each other (10:22).

- 13] And king Solomon raised a levy out of all Israel; and the levy was thirty thousand men.
14] And he sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month by courses: a month they were in Lebanon, *and* two months at home: and Adoniram *was* over the levy.

Adoniram, who was placed over the levy, came to be thoroughly detested (12:18). In addition, Solomon had 70,000 transporters and 80,000 stonecutters working in the mountains to the north. It appears that all the able-bodied males, except the members of the royal court, were engaged in some employment concerned with the construction of the Temple.

- 15] And Solomon had threescore and ten thousand that bare burdens, and fourscore thousand hewers in the mountains;
16] Beside the chief of Solomon's officers which *were* over the work, three thousand and three hundred, which ruled over the people that wrought in the work.

The 3,300 foremen plus an additional 550 (9:23) equal 3,850 (cf. the 3,600 foremen in 2 Chr 2:18 plus 250 in 2 Chr 8:10).

- 17] And the king commanded, and they brought great stones, costly stones, *and* hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house.
18] And Solomon's builders and Hiram's builders did hew *them*, and the stonesquarers: so they prepared timber and stones to build the house.

Working under Adoniram (cf. 1 Kgs 4:6), the carriers transported materials from place to place and the stonecutters cut massive limestone blocks out of the quarry in the hills north of Jerusalem.

גִּבְלִי *Giblyi*, [KJV, "stonesquarers"]: *Giblites* = "a boundary"; inhabitants of Gebal [NIV]. The men of Gebal (modern Byblos, 13 miles north of Beirut, and 60 miles north of Tyre) made a significant contribution by preparing timber and stone along with Solomon's and Hiram's craftsmen.

1 Kings 6 Construction of the Temple

- 1] And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which *is* the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD.

This verse is one of the most important in the Old Testament chronologically because it enables one to fix certain dates in Israel's history. The dates of Solomon's reign have been quite definitely established through references in ancient writings. They were 971-931 B.C. According to this verse, in the fourth year of his reign Solomon began to build the temple: 966 B.C.

- 2] And the house which king Solomon built for the LORD, the length thereof *was* threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof twenty *cubits*, and the height thereof thirty cubits.

The Cubit

The cubit is about 18 inches, the standard for measures of length among the Hebrews. They derived it from the Babylonians, but a similar measure was used in Egypt. The length of the cubit is variously estimated, since there seems to have been a double standard in both countries, and because we have no undisputed example of the cubit remaining to the present time.

The original cubit was the length of the forearm, from the elbow to the end of the middle finger, as is implied from the derivation of the word in Hebrew (אֶמְלָא; *ammah*) and in Latin (*cubitum*). It seems to be referred to also in Deut 3:11: "after the cubit of a man." This was too indefinite for a scientific standard; the Babylonians early adopted a more accurate method of measurement which passed to the nations of the West. However, they had a double standard, the so-called royal cubit and the ordinary one. From the remains of buildings in Assyria and Babylonia, the royal cubit is made out to be about 20.6 inches, and a cubit of similar length was used in Egypt and must have been known to the Hebrews. This was probably the cubit mentioned by Ezek 40:5 and perhaps that of Solomon's temple, "cubits after the first measure" (2 Chr 3:3); i.e., the ancient cubit.

The ordinary cubit of commerce was shorter, and has been variously estimated at between 16 and 18 or more inches, but the evidence of the Siloam inscription and of the tombs in Palestine seems to indicate 17.6 inches as the average length. This was the cubit of six palms, while the longer one was of seven (Ezek 40:5). So the temple was about 90 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 45 feet high; (the porch (v.3) added an additional 30 feet). It was not that large: only 2,700 square feet of floor space. But it was strikingly beautiful in appearance because of its white limestone, cedar, and gold exterior.

- 3] And the porch before the temple of the house, twenty cubits *was* the length thereof, according to the breadth of the house; *and* ten cubits *was* the breadth thereof before the house.

It had a large open front porch (portico) that added 30 more feet to its length, and may be of significance theologically as a fundamental model, since it is a significant variation from the model of the Tabernacle, and of profound significance in applying the seven declarations (“You are the Temple of God”) in the NT. (See *Architecture of Man* briefing pack, or better yet, *The Way of Agape* as an application to our daily walk.)

- 4] And for the house he made windows of narrow lights.
5] And against the wall of the house he built chambers round about, *against* the walls of the house round about, *both* of the temple and of the oracle: and he made chambers round about:

Chambers: Hebrew יָצוּוּא *yatsuwa'*: these are best understood as side rooms, or cells, which were reserved for the priests and their personal belongings. “Oracle”: דְּבִיר *debiyr*, the Holy of Holies, the innermost room of the temple or tabernacle. Cf. v. 16.

- 6] The nethermost chamber *was* five cubits broad, and the middle *was* six cubits broad, and the third *was* seven cubits broad: for without *in the wall* of the house he made narrowed rests round about, that *the beams* should not be fastened in the walls of the house.

The temple’s main hall and the inner sanctuary were the holy place and the most holy place, respectively. This triple-deck wooden structure around the building was built against the outer sides and perhaps the back of the temple. This structure was probably about 25-30 feet high and was divided into three stories of side rooms each of which was 7 1/2 feet high on the inside. These “chambers of wood” were used by the priests for storage and service. [In the spiritual personal typology, they seem to suggest the subconscious. See *The Way of Agape* for a detailed discussion and application.] The rooms were smallest (7 1/2 ft. wide) on the first floor which also contained hallways and stairways (cf. v. 8), larger on the second floor (9 ft. wide) with some space also given to halls and stairs, and largest on the third floor (10 1/2 ft. wide). The offset ledges were apparently the supports for the upper floor which were built into the walls of this surrounding structure. The measurements are probably inside dimensions.

- 7] And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe *nor* any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building.

Apparently Solomon felt that the noise of construction was not appropriate for this temple in view of its purpose. So he had all the building parts cut and fitted at the quarry so that they could be assembled quietly on the site.

- 8] The door for the middle chamber *was* in the right side of the house: and they went up with winding stairs into the middle *chamber*, and out of the middle into the third.
9] So he built the house, and finished it; and covered the house with beams and boards of cedar.
10] And *then* he built chambers against all the house, five cubits high: and they rested on the house *with* timber of cedar.

The temple faced east, but the entrance to the surrounding structure (v. 5) was on the south. The side rooms on all floors were connected by internal staircases and passageways. Though no beams of this side structure were “inserted into the temple walls” (v. 6), the inner walls of the side rooms were attached to the temple by cedar beams (v. 10).

- 11] And the word of the LORD came to Solomon, saying,
12] *Concerning* this house which thou art in building, if thou wilt walk in my statutes, and execute my judgments, and keep all my commandments to walk in them; then will I perform my word with thee, which I spake unto David thy father:

During the temple construction God reaffirmed to Solomon the promise He had previously made to David. “The promise” given David to which God referred was that He would “establish the throne of [David’s] kingdom forever” (2 Sam 7:13). God would do this through Solomon if Solomon would obey Him. Later Solomon’s disobedience resulted in God’s removing part of the nation from the control of his son Rehoboam.

- 13] And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel.

God also promised that if Solomon obeyed the Lord his nation would enjoy God’s fellowship and protection but Israel experienced this only partially because of Solomon’s later apostasy.

- 14] So Solomon built the house, and finished it.
15] And he built the walls of the house within with boards of cedar, both the floor of the house, and the walls of the ceiling: *and* he covered *them* on the inside with wood, and covered the floor of the house with planks of fir.

The entire interior of the temple was covered with cedar boards (on the walls) and with pine (or cypress) boards (on the floor), all overlaid with gold (vv. 22, 30).

- 16] And he built twenty cubits on the sides of the house, both the floor and the walls with boards of cedar: he even built *them* for it within, *even* for the oracle, *even* for the most holy *place*.
17] And the house, that *is*, the temple before it, was forty cubits *long*.

The main hall in front of the inner sanctuary (the “Holy of Holies”) was the holy place. The main hall was twice the length of the most holy place.

- 18] And the cedar of the house within *was* carved with knops and open flowers: all *was* cedar; there was no stone seen.
- 19] And the oracle he prepared in the house within, to set there the ark of the covenant of the LORD.

“Oracle”: דְּבִיּוֹר *debiyr*, the holy of holies, the innermost room of the temple or tabernacle. Cf. v. 16. It was a 30-foot cube, all overlaid with gold, and contained the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat.

- 20] And the oracle in the forepart *was* twenty cubits in length, and twenty cubits in breadth, and twenty cubits in the height thereof: and he overlaid it with pure gold; and *so* covered the altar *which was of* cedar.
- 21] So Solomon overlaid the house within with pure gold: and he made a partition by the chains of gold before the oracle; and he overlaid it with gold.
- 22] And the whole house he overlaid with gold, until he had finished all the house: also the whole altar that *was* by the oracle he overlaid with gold.

The altar (v. 22) is the incense altar located in the holy place, in front of the Holiest of Holies. Solomon’s incense altar was made of cedar and overlaid with gold; it was also called “the golden altar” (7:48). First Kings 6:22a recapitulates part of what was stated in verses 14-21.

- 23] And within the oracle he made two cherubims *of* olive tree, *each* ten cubits high.
- 24] And five cubits *was* the one wing of the cherub, and five cubits the other wing of the cherub: from the uttermost part of the one wing unto the uttermost part of the other *were* ten cubits.
- 25] And the other cherub *was* ten cubits: both the cherubims *were* of one measure and one size.
- 26] The height of the one cherub *was* ten cubits, and so *was it* of the other cherub.
- 27] And he set the cherubims within the inner house: and they stretched forth the wings of the cherubims, so that the wing of the one touched the *one* wall, and the wing of the other cherub touched the other wall; and their wings touched one another in the midst of the house.
- 28] And he overlaid the cherubims with gold.
- 29] And he carved all the walls of the house round about with carved figures of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers, within and without.

The walls of the inner and outer rooms, the most holy place and the holy place, respectively, were decorated with carved cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers.

- 30] And the floor of the house he overlaid with gold, within and without.
- 31] And for the entering of the oracle he made doors *of* olive tree: the lintel *and* side posts *were* a fifth part *of the wall*.

The doors leading from the holy place may have been framed with five-sided jambs (frames). Some commentators believe they were sliding doors.

- 32] The two doors also *were of* olive tree; and he carved upon them carvings of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers, and overlaid *them* with gold, and spread gold upon the cherubims, and upon the palm trees.
- 33] So also made he for the door of the temple posts *of* olive tree, a fourth part *of the wall*.
- 34] And the two doors *were of* fir tree: the two leaves of the one door *were* folding, and the two leaves of the other door *were* folding.

The doors leading from the porch into the main hall (the holy place) were made of pine (v. 34). They hung on four-sided jambs and were bifold (each having two leaves hinged together that folded open against each other and turned on sockets or pivot points).

- 35] And he carved *thereon* cherubims and palm trees and open flowers: and covered *them* with gold fitted upon the carved work.
- 36] And he built the inner court with three rows of hewed stone, and a row of cedar beams.

The inner courtyard was an open plaza surrounding the temple. There was also an outer courtyard not mentioned here (cf. 2 Chr 4:9), which was somewhat lower in elevation than the inner courtyard (cf. “upper courtyard” in Jer. 36:10). This inner courtyard (also called the “courtyard of the priests,” 2 Chr 4:9) was separated from the outer (great) court by the wall described here. This wall consisted of three courses (rows) of dressed (cut) stone (limestone) and one course (row) of cedar beams. (The outer courtyard was also surrounded by a wall.) The size of the inner courtyard is not given, but if the dimensions of the courtyards of the temple are proportionate to those of the tabernacle courtyard, as the dimensions of the temple and tabernacle structures are, the inner courtyard was about 150 feet wide and 400 feet long.

- 37] In the fourth year was the foundation of the house of the LORD laid, in the month Ziv:
- 38] And in the eleventh year, in the month Bul, which *is* the eighth month, was the house finished throughout all the parts thereof, and according to all the fashion of it. So was he seven years in building it.

Seven years were spent building the temple, from the 4th year of Solomon’s reign (966 B.C.; cf. comments on 6:1) to his 11th year (959 B.C.). More precisely, this was seven and one-half years. Ziv is April-May and Bul, the eighth month, is October-November.

1 Kings 7 Solomon’s Palace

- 1] But Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished all his house.

The description of Solomon's palace in verses 1-12 raises a question as to whether one building or several were constructed; probably one palace complex was built that contained several separate but interconnected buildings. The palace took longer to build than the temple (13 years compared with 7 1/2; cf. 6:37-38) because it was larger.

- 2] He built also the house of the forest of Lebanon; the length thereof *was* an hundred cubits, and the breadth thereof fifty cubits, and the height thereof thirty cubits, upon four rows of cedar pillars, with cedar beams upon the pillars.

"The House of the Forest of Lebanon" (cf. 10:17, 21; Isa 22:8) was probably given its name because of the extensive use of Lebanese cedar throughout (cf. 1 Kgs 7:2-3); it was located not in Lebanon but in Jerusalem. It measured 150 feet by 75 feet and was 45 feet high. The floor space was 11,250 square feet, more than four times the 2,700 square feet of the temple floor (cf. 6:2). The palace evidently served as an armory (10:17; cf. Isa 22:8). Apparently next to it was a pillared colonnade (a covered walkway surrounding a patio) that had a front portico (porch) with a roof and supporting pillars.

- 3] And *it was* covered with cedar above upon the beams, that *lay* on forty five pillars, fifteen *in* a row.
4] And *there were* windows *in* three rows, and light *was* against light *in* three ranks.
5] And all the doors and posts *were* square, with the windows: and light *was* against light *in* three ranks.
6] And he made a porch of pillars; the length thereof *was* fifty cubits, and the breadth thereof thirty cubits: and the porch *was* before them: and the *other* pillars and the thick beam *were* before them.
7] Then he made a porch for the throne where he might judge, *even* the porch of judgment: and *it was* covered with cedar from one side of the floor to the other.

Solomon's throne hall, the Porch of Judgment, or Hall of Justice, was attached to the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon, as were his own residence (v. 8a) and a separate residence (palace) for Pharaoh's daughter, whom he had married (v. 8b), all of harmonious design.

- 8] And his house where he dwelt *had* another court within the porch, *which was* of the like work. Solomon made also an house for Pharaoh's daughter, whom he had taken *to wife*, like unto this porch.
9] All these *were of* costly stones, according to the measures of hewed stones, sawed with saws, within and without, even from the foundation unto the coping, and *so* on the outside toward the great court.

A great courtyard united all these buildings into one palace complex. The structures were all built of stone (except the roofs) and they rested on stone foundations. Each stone was cut to size with a saw. Palestinianian

limestone can be cut with a saw when freshly quarried, but hardens when exposed to the elements.

- 10] And the foundation *was of* costly stones, even great stones, stones of ten cubits, and stones of eight cubits.
11] And above *were* costly stones, after the measures of hewed stones, and cedars.
12] And the great court round about *was* with three rows of hewed stones, and a row of cedar beams, both for the inner court of the house of the LORD, and for the porch of the house.

The great palace courtyard was protected by a wall similar in design to that around the inner courtyard of the temple (cf. 6:36). The palace was probably built close to (perhaps south of) the temple, though, so far, none of its remains have been found by archaeologists.

Temple Furnishings

- 13] And king Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre.

Hiram [NIV "Hiram" is a variant spelling of the Heb. Hiram) should not be confused with Hiram, the king of Tyre (5:1).]

- 14] He *was* a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father *was* a man of Tyre, a worker in brass: and he was filled with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass. And he came to king Solomon, and wrought all his work.

This Hiram was a skilled craftsman, also from Tyre, whose mother was an Israelite widow from Naphtali, and whose father was a Phoenician of Tyre. (According to 2 Chr 2:14 Hiram's mother was from Dan; perhaps Dan was the tribe into which she was born and Naphtali was her residence, or vice versa). Hiram's special talent was working with bronze (a copper alloy). The brass should be rendered *copper* or *bronze*.

- 15] For he cast two pillars of brass, of eighteen cubits high apiece: and a line of twelve cubits did compass either of them about.

An alleged discrepancy between verse 15 and 2 Chr 3:15: In front of the temple were two free-standing pillars 35 cubits (52 1/2 feet) tall including a 5-cubit (7 1/2 feet) capital. But according to 1 Kgs 7:15 these pillars, made of bronze, stood 18 cubits (27 feet) high. One explanation of this alleged discrepancy is suggested by the NIV which supplies the word *together* in 2 Chr 3:15. The thought is that when the heights of the two pillars are added together they total 35 cubits. This is a close (though not exact) harmonization because two pillars of 18 cubits each total 36, not 35. Another solution suggests that the Hebrew figures for 18 and 35 are so similar that a scribe copying v. 15 could easily have read 35 when the text

actually said 18. Architecturally it seems more reasonable that the pillars would be in line with or less than the height of the temple, not towering far above it. The temple height was 30 cubits (45 feet, 1 Kgs 6:2), so each pillar may have been 18 cubits (27 feet) not 35 cubits (52½ feet). Cf. 2Chr 3:15-17; Jer 52:21-23. Other sources suggest that the pillars flanking the entrance to the court were fifty-two feet high, with the crown or capital measuring seven and one-half feet. They appear to have been for ornamentation only. Around the top each had decorative chains from which pomegranates were suspended.

- 16] And he made two chapters *of* molten brass, to set upon the tops of the pillars: the height of the one chapter *was* five cubits, and the height of the other chapter *was* five cubits:
 17] *And* nets of checker work, and wreaths of chain work, for the chapters which *were* upon the top of the pillars; seven for the one chapter, and seven for the other chapter.

Above the band of chains at the top of each pillar was a band of 100 engraved pomegranates. Actually 200 pomegranates were on each pillar (2 Chr 4:13), thus suggesting that there were two bands or rows (1 Kgs 7:18) of 100 each. The pomegranates on each pillar were interwoven among the chainlike lattice, with seven chains on each pillar (1 Kgs 7:17).

- 18] And he made the pillars, and two rows round about upon the one network, to cover the chapters that *were* upon the top, with pomegranates: and so did he for the other chapter.
 19] And the chapters that *were* upon the top of the pillars *were* of lily work in the porch, four cubits.

Since the capitals on top of the pillars were five cubits high (2 Chr 3:15) and since each capital's top portion, shaped like lilies, was four cubits high (1 Kgs 7:19) that left one cubit for the chains and pomegranates.

- 20] And the chapters upon the two pillars *had pomegranates* also above, over against the belly which *was* by the network: and the pomegranates *were* two hundred in rows round about upon the other chapter.
 21] And he set up the pillars in the porch of the temple: and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof Jachin: and he set up the left pillar, and called the name thereof Boaz.

The pillars were erected on either side of the temple portico (the *roofless* front porch?). Jachin, the name of the south pillar, means "By His [Yahweh] counsel," and Boaz, the name of the north pillar, means "In Him [Yahweh] is strength." These stood as a testimony to God's security and strength available to the nation as she obeyed Him. (And their architectural implications may have profound implications in personal application in the "architecture" of man. See *The Way of Agape* for a detailed study.)

- 22] And upon the top of the pillars *was* lily work: so *was* the work of the pillars finished.
 23] And he made a molten sea, ten cubits from the one brim to the other: *it was* round all about, and his height *was* five cubits: and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about.

Inerrancy?

This would seem to an "error:" the "line of 30 cubits compassing it round about," that is, the circumference, is *not* three times the diameter, but 3.14159265358979, commonly known as *pi*, π . However, in the Masoretic text, the term is misspelled (known as a *kethiv*) with an extra *heh*, הָקֵי. The marginal correction (known as a *qere*) is spelled correctly, קֵי. The *gematrical* value as recorded is 111; the correct value would be 106. When this correction, 111/106, is applied to three times the diameter of 10 cubits, the circumference would be 31.41509433962 cubits: in a circumference of over 46 feet, *an error of less than 15 thousandths of an inch!*

- 24] And under the brim of it round about *there were* knops compassing it, ten in a cubit, compassing the sea round about: the knops *were* cast in two rows, when it *was* cast.
 25] It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east: and the sea *was set* above upon them, and all their hinder parts *were* inward.
 26] And *it was* an hand breadth thick, and the brim thereof *was* wrought like the brim of a cup, with flowers of lilies: it contained two thousand baths.

The "Sea" contained 2,000 baths (ca. 11,500 gallons; cf. NIV marg.) of water. (2 Chr 4:5 includes the statement that the laver held 3,000 baths (ca. 17,500 gallons); perhaps this was its total capacity, but it apparently contained 2,000 baths.)

- 27] And he made ten bases of brass; four cubits *was* the length of one base, and four cubits the breadth thereof, and three cubits the height of it.

The 10 bronze movable stands were evidently used for butchering sacrificial animals. Each was six feet square and five and one-half feet high at its highest point.

- 28] And the work of the bases *was* on this *manner*: they had borders, and the borders *were* between the ledges:
 29] And on the borders that *were* between the ledges *were* lions, oxen, and cherubims: and upon the ledges *there was* a base above: and beneath the lions and oxen *were* certain additions made of thin work.
 30] And every base had four brassen wheels, and plates of brass: and the four corners

thereof had undersetters: under the laver *were* undersetters molten, at the side of every addition.

On the surface of each stand was a basin (v.38) that held about 230 gallons (40 baths) of water. Apparently another basin (v.30) drained into a circular frame (perhaps a tank) below through an opening. Each stand had decorated panels on each side, and four bronze wheels. These 10 identical work tables could be wheeled around the inner courtyard (though with difficulty) as needed. Five were stationed on the south side of the temple and five on the north.

- 31] And the mouth of it within the chapter and above *was* a cubit: but the mouth thereof *was* round *after* the work of the base, a cubit and an half: and also upon the mouth of it *were* gravings with their borders, foursquare, not round.
- 32] And under the borders *were* four wheels; and the axletrees of the wheels *were joined* to the base: and the height of a wheel *was* a cubit and half a cubit.
- 33] And the work of the wheels *was* like the work of a chariot wheel: their axletrees, and their naves, and their felloes, and their spokes, *were* all molten.
- 34] And *there were* four undersetters to the four corners of one base: *and* the undersetters *were* of the very base itself.
- 35] And in the top of the base *was there* a round compass of half a cubit high: and on the top of the base the ledges thereof and the borders thereof *were* of the same.
- 36] For on the plates of the ledges thereof, and on the borders thereof, he graved cherubims, lions, and palm trees, according to the proportion of every one, and additions round about.
- 37] After this *manner* he made the ten bases: all of them had one casting, one measure, *and* one size.
- 38] Then made he ten lavers of brass: one laver contained forty baths: *and* every laver was four cubits: *and* upon every one of the ten bases one laver.
- 39] And he put five bases on the right side of the house, and five on the left side of the house: and he set the sea on the right side of the house eastward over against the south.
- 40] And Hiram made the lavers, and the shovels, and the basons. So Hiram made an end of doing all the work that he made king Solomon for the house of the LORD:

This summary of Hiram's handiwork excludes the bronze altar which he also fashioned (2 Chr 4:1). Recording the crafting of these furnishings in so much detail emphasizes the magnificent beauty, symmetry, and glory of the temple.

- 41] The two pillars, and the *two* bowls of the chapters that *were* on the top of the two pillars; and the two networks, to cover the two bowls of the chapters which *were* upon the top of the pillars;
- 42] And four hundred pomegranates for the two networks, *even* two rows of pomegranates for one network, to cover the two bowls of the chapters that *were* upon the pillars;
- 43] And the ten bases, and ten lavers on the bases;
- 44] And one sea, and twelve oxen under the sea;

- 45] And the pots, and the shovels, and the basons: and all these vessels, which Hiram made to king Solomon for the house of the LORD, *were of* bright brass.
- 46] In the plain of Jordan did the king cast them, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zarthan.

The bronze objects were cast in clay molds in the Jordan Valley between Succoth and Zarethan, about 35 miles north of the Dead Sea and east of the Jordan River.

- 47] And Solomon left all the vessels *unweighed*, because they were exceeding many: neither was the weight of the brass found out.

Bronze was so abundant that it was not even weighed. Bronze was used for the furnishings outside the temple (vv. 40-45), but all the furniture on the inside was made of gold.

- 48] And Solomon made all the vessels that *pertained* unto the house of the LORD: the altar of gold, and the table of gold, whereupon the shewbread *was*, The golden altar was the altar of incense. The table for the bread of the Presence ("showbread," כִּבֵּן) was possibly one larger table with nine others with it, which, though not mentioned here, are mentioned in 2 Chronicles 4:8 ("10 tables") and 2 Chronicles 4:19 ("tables").
- 49] And the candlesticks of pure gold, five on the right *side*, and five on the left, before the oracle, with the flowers, and the lamps, and the tongs *of* gold,

Whereas the tabernacle had one lampstand, *menorah*, the temple had 10 lampstands in the holy place (the main hall).
- 50] And the bowls, and the snuffers, and the basons, and the spoons, and the censers *of* pure gold; and the hinges *of* gold, *both* for the doors of the inner house, the most holy *place*, *and* for the doors of the house, *to wit*, of the temple.
- 51] So was ended all the work that king Solomon made for the house of the LORD. And Solomon brought in the things which David his father had dedicated; *even* the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, did he put among the treasures of the house of the LORD.

To all these items were added the furnishings King David had prepared and dedicated for temple service (2 Sam 8:11; 1 Chr 22:14; 29:1-9).

1 Kings 8 Dedication of the Temple

- 1] Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto king Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which *is* Zion.

After all the new furnishings, utensils, and accessories had been made and placed in position (chap. 6; 7:13-51), Solomon summoned the people for the installation of the ark and the dedication of the temple.

- 2] And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto king Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which *is* the seventh month.

The ceremony was scheduled for the festival in the month of Ethanim, the earlier name for the month Tishri; (the Feast of Tabernacles in September-October [Lev 23:33-36]).

- 3] And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark.
4] And they brought up the ark of the LORD, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that *were* in the tabernacle, even those did the priests and the Levites bring up.

Formerly the ark had rested in the tabernacle David pitched (2 Sam. 6:17) on Mount Zion, the southeast portion of Jerusalem called the City of David (cf. 2 Sam 5:7).

- 5] And king Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel, that were assembled unto him, *were* with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen, that could not be told nor numbered for multitude.
6] And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD unto his place, into the oracle of the house, to the most holy *place*, *even* under the wings of the cherubims.
7] For the cherubims spread forth *their* two wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubims covered the ark and the staves thereof above.
8] And they drew out the staves, that the ends of the staves were seen out in the holy *place* before the oracle, and they were not seen without: and there they are unto this day.

This implies that the staves were across the shorter dimension, not along the longer dimension as it is usually rendered in artistic conjectures. They would thus be seen protruding against the veil, evidencing its presence even though enclosed. The statement that the poles are still there today suggests that this part of 1 Kings was written before the temple was destroyed in 586 B.C.

- 9] *There was* nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when the LORD made *a covenant* with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt.

The two stone tablets of the Law placed in the ark by Moses were still there. They served to remind Israel that the nation was still under the blessings and responsibilities of the Mosaic Covenant. In Heb 9:4 two other articles are mentioned as being in the ark, i.e., the pot of manna and

Aaron's flowering rod. The seeming discrepancy between the OT (1 Kgs 8:9) and the NT in this connection may arise from the fact that the Hebrews verse refers to an earlier period, perhaps to Mosaic times.

- 10] And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy *place*, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD,
11] So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD.

Shekinah

The cloud that filled the temple was a visible representation of the Lord's glory. The Hebrew so rendered means "a covering," because clouds cover the sky. The word is used as a symbol of the Divine presence, as indicating the splendor of that glory which it conceals (Ex 16:10 33:9 Num 11:25 12:5 Job 22:14 Ps 18:11). A bright cloud is the symbolical seat of the Divine presence (Ex 29:42,43 1 Kgs 8:10 2 Chr 5:14 Ezek 43:4). When the Lord led Israel out of Egypt, he went before them "in a pillar of a cloud." This was the symbol of his presence with his people (Cf. Ex 13:22; 14:20; 33:9,10; 40:34-38 Le 9:23,24 Num 14:10 16:19,42). This pillar preceded the people as they marched, resting on the ark (Ex 13:21 40:36). By night it became a pillar of fire (Num 9:17-23). Jehovah came down upon Sinai in a cloud (Ex 19:9) and the cloud filled the court around the tabernacle in the wilderness so that Moses could not enter it (Ex 40:34,35).

Shechinah, a Chaldee word meaning resting-place, not found in Scripture, but used by the later Jews to designate this visible symbol of God's presence in the tabernacle, and afterwards in Solomon's temple.

At the consecration of the temple by Solomon, when it filled the whole house with its glory, so that the priests could not stand to minister (1 Kgs 8:10-13 2 Chr 5:13,14 7:1-3). Probably it remained in the first temple in the holy of holies as the symbol of Jehovah's presence so long as that temple stood. Ezekiel, in a vision, saw the glory of the Lord leaving the temple (Ezek 10:4; 11:23). Its return is foretold (Ezek 43:2; Isa 4:5).

Paul speaks of "the glory," i.e. the divine glory cloud, as Israel's peculiar privilege (Rom 9:4). In like manner when Christ comes the second time he is described as coming "in the clouds" (Mt 17:5 24:30 Act 1:9,11).

- 12] Then spake Solomon, The LORD said that he would dwell in the thick darkness.

Solomon explained to the people that God had said He would dwell in the cloud over the temple. A cloud often symbolized God's presence (cf. Ex 19:9; 34:5; Lev 16:2; Deut 4:11; 31:15).

- 13] I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever.
- 14] And the king turned his face about, and blessed all the congregation of Israel: (and all the congregation of Israel stood;)
- 15] And he said, Blessed *be* the LORD God of Israel, which spake with his mouth unto David my father, and hath with his hand fulfilled *it*, saying,
- 16] Since the day that I brought forth my people Israel out of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build an house, that my name might be therein; but I chose David to be over my people Israel.
- 17] And it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel.

The promise Solomon referred to was that God would place His Name in Jerusalem. “Name” occurs in Solomon’s prayer 14 times (1 Kgs 8: 16-20, 29, 33, 35, 41-44 [twice in v. 43], 48). The temple was not to be a “container” for God (v. 27) but a place for his Name to dwell (vv. 16-17, 19-20), that is, a place where His presence and character would be evident.

- 18] And the LORD said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart.
- 19] Nevertheless thou shalt not build the house; but thy son that shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house unto my name.

Solomon explained that God had promised David that his son would build the temple (cf. 2 Sam 7:12-13).

- 20] And the LORD hath performed his word that he spake, and I am risen up in the room of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel.
- 21] And I have set there a place for the ark, wherein *is* the covenant of the LORD, which he made with our fathers, when he brought them out of the land of Egypt.

God had been faithful, and Solomon glorified Him for it. The temple was primarily a place for the Ark, (the throne of God on earth?) and the repository of God’s covenant promises to His redeemed people. In this address Solomon demonstrated humility and thankfulness. (See *The Seat of Mercy* briefing package for a possible prophetic destiny of this relic in the Millennium.)

Solomon’s Prayer of Dedication (8:22-53)

- 22] And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven:

Solomon stood and then kneeled (v. 54) on a special platform that had been built in the temple courtyard for the dedication service (2 Chr 6:12-42). He

began his prayer with worship and praise to God for His uniqueness and His faithfulness in keeping His promises. His prayer will include 7 petitions:

1) God’s presence and protection

- 23] And he said, LORD God of Israel, *there is* no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart:

“Mercy”: Hebrew **חֶסֶד** *chesed* implies covenantal love, the kind of love that is expressed in the covenant between God and his people. Solomon prayed for a continuance of this covenantal love. The terms of fulfillment of this love are set forth upon the grounds of obedience and faith. Through David’s line, the promises culminated in his great son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

- 24] Who hast kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him: thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled *it* with thine hand, as *it is* this day.
- 25] Therefore now, LORD God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit on the throne of Israel; so that thy children take heed to their way, that they walk before me as thou hast walked before me.
- 26] And now, O God of Israel, let thy word, I pray thee, be verified, which thou spakest unto thy servant David my father.
- 27] But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?
- 28] Yet have thou respect unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer, which thy servant prayeth before thee to day:
- 29] That thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, *even* toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there: that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place.
- 30] And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive.

2) Forgiveness of trespasses.

- 31] If any man trespass against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to cause him to swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house:
- 32] Then hear thou in heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked, to bring his way upon his head; and justifying the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness.

3) Forgiveness for sins causing defeats from enemies.

- 33] When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee, and shall turn again to thee, and confess thy name, and pray, and make supplication unto thee in this house:
- 34] Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest unto their fathers.

4) Forgiveness of sins that had brought on calamity

- 35] When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou afflictest them:
- 36] Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk, and give rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance.
- 37] If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, *or* if there be caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness *there be*;

These afflictions are here viewed as intensified above the normal course of events as disciplinary measures. Solomon, however, recognized that the primary need was not the removal of these obnoxious creatures, but the remission of sin (v. 39).

- 38] What prayer and supplication soever be *made* by any man, *or* by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house:
- 39] Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, *even* thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;)
- 40] That they may fear thee all the days that they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers.

5) Mercy for God-fearing foreigners.

- 41] Moreover concerning a stranger, that *is* not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for thy name's sake;
- 42] (For they shall hear of thy great name, and of thy strong hand, and of thy stretched out arm;) when he shall come and pray toward this house;
- 43] Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for: that all people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as *do* thy people Israel; and that they may know that this house, which I have builded, is called by thy name.

6) Victory in battle.

- 44] If thy people go out to battle against their enemy, whithersoever thou shalt send them, and shall pray unto the LORD toward the city which thou hast chosen, and *toward* the house that I have built for thy name:
- 45] Then hear thou in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause.

7) Restoration after captivity.

- 46] If they sin against thee, (for *there is* no man that sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near;

- 47] *Yet* if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness;
- 48] And *so* return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name:
- 49] Then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling place, and maintain their cause,
- 50] And forgive thy people that have sinned against thee, and all their transgressions wherein they have transgressed against thee, and give them compassion before them who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them:
- 51] For they *be* thy people, and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest forth out of Egypt, from the midst of the furnace of iron:
- 52] That thine eyes may be open unto the supplication of thy servant, and unto the supplication of thy people Israel, to hearken unto them in all that they call for unto thee.
- 53] For thou didst separate them from among all the people of the earth, *to be* thine inheritance, as thou spakest by the hand of Moses thy servant, when thou broughtest our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord GOD.

These calamities were all listed in Deuteronomy as curses on Israel for her breaking the covenant (Deut 28:22, 25, 38, 42, 59; 31:17, 29; 32:24).

Solomon's Blessing of the People (8:54-61)

- 54] And it was *so*, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven.
- 55] And he stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying,
- 56] Blessed *be* the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant.
- 57] The LORD our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us:
- 58] That he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers.
- 59] And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the LORD, be nigh unto the LORD our God day and night, that he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require:
- 60] That all the people of the earth may know that the LORD *is* God, *and that there is* none else.
- 61] Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day.

In order for all this to take place Solomon reminded the people that they must be fully committed to the LORD and obedient to His Word. Unfortunately, Solomon himself eventually failed to do this. As the king finished speaking, “fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple” (2 Chr 7:1) as it had earlier filled the tabernacle (Ex 40:34-35; Lev 9:23-24).

Solomon’s Sacrifices (8:62-66)

- 62] And the king, and all Israel with him, offered sacrifice before the LORD.
63] And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered unto the LORD, two and twenty thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the LORD.

The number of animals sacrificed seems incredibly large. But records of other sacrifices that involved thousands of animals are extant. One must remember that thousands of priests sacrificed on many auxiliary altars, and the celebration lasted for two weeks. This dedication took place at the beginning of the festival of Tabernacles which normally lasted one week, but was extended to two weeks on this special occasion.

- 64] The same day did the king hallow the middle of the court that *was* before the house of the LORD: for there he offered burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings: because the brasen altar that *was* before the LORD *was* too little to receive the burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings.
65] And at that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt, before the LORD our God, seven days and seven days, *even* fourteen days.

The Feast of Tabernacles commemorated Israel’s years of wandering in the wilderness (Lev 23:33, 41-43). It was fitting that the temple should be dedicated at this feast since that permanent sanctuary now symbolized the end of Israel’s wanderings. People from as far away as Lebo Hamath in northern Israel toward the Euphrates River and the Wadi of Egypt (modern Wadi el-Arish) far to the south attended the festivities; all Israel participated.

- 66] On the eighth day he sent the people away: and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the LORD had done for David his servant, and for Israel his people.

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) Who helped pay the bill for Solomon’s Temple?

- 2) What created a strain in the relationship with Hiram of Tyre?
- 3) How long is a cubit? Why?
- 4) The interior of the Temple was gold; the exterior implements were of bronze. What does that symbolize? Is there a personal application?
- 5) Distinguish between the Hiram, king of Tyre, and Hiram the artisan in bronze.
- 6) What was the significance of the two pillars in front of the Temple?
- 7) What was stored in the Ark (originally)? What remained in Solomon’s day?

Discussion Questions

(“Where two people agree, one is redundant.”)

- 1) Discuss the architecture of the Temple, and how it differed from the Tabernacle.
- 2) Seven times the NT indicates that “Ye are the Temple of God.” (1 Cor 3:9-17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph 2:20,21; Heb 3:6; 1 Pet 2:5; 4:17). What does that mean?
- 3) Some suggest that the “chambers of wood” was where the priests hid their personal idols. Does it model our subconscious? If so, how?
- 4) Review the seven petitions of Solomon at the dedication, and apply them to us today.

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Undertake a careful and detailed study of the Temple. How did it differ from the Tabernacle?
- 2) Trace the appearance of “clouds” in the Scripture, with particular emphasis on the *Shekinah*.
- 3) Explore the alternative chronologies for the Exodus from Egypt.

Preparation for Next Session:

Read chapters 9 – 11 to complete the reign of Solomon.

Notes:

1. Official Catalog, Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Item 212, Ground Floor, Room 13.

Session 4 1 Kings 9 - 11

The later years of Solomon's reign

God's covenant with Solomon (9:1-9); Solomon's achievements (9:10-28); Solomon's glory (chapter 10); Solomon's apostasy (chapter 11).

1 Kings 9

- 1] And it came to pass, when Solomon had finished the building of the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all Solomon's desire which he was pleased to do,
- 2] That the LORD appeared to Solomon the second time, as he had appeared unto him at Gibeon.

As God had revealed Himself to Solomon at Gibeon (3:4-5), so He did again, probably in Jerusalem.

- 3] And the LORD said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.
- 4] And if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, *and* will keep my statutes and my judgments:
- 5] Then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever, as I promised to David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel.

But the LORD also warned the king. If he would walk before God, manifesting attitudes and actions that expressed obedience to the Lord's Word, God would provide an unceasing line of descendants for Solomon who would always rule over Israel. Comparison of this passage with 2 Chr 7:12-22 reveals some interesting variations in the terms on which revival was conditioned: "And as for thee, if thou wilt walk before me." God held up the example of David, a godly father, as a bright and shining standard for the monarch. It is deeply significant that no great moral scandal is connected with the name or reign of Solomon, yet he never attained to the high spiritual character of his father, and at best died under the displeasure of the Lord. The promise is therefore to be viewed as conditional.

- 6] *But* if ye shall at all turn from following me, ye or your children, and will not keep my commandments *and* my statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods, and worship them:
- 7] Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house,

which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight; and Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all people:

The announced penalty was twofold:

- 1) the kingdom would cease;
- 2) the Temple, in which both king and people took such pardonable pride, would be leveled to the ground.

The subsequent history of Israel fully established the validity of this prophetic warning. After the destruction of the Temple in 586/585 B.C., at the hand of the Babylonians, never again—neither at the time of the restoration, nor yet under Herod the Great—did it attain to its old glory. The cause of Israel's falling away was idolatry. It is noteworthy that Solomon, to whom the warning was given, was soon to be guilty of this very offense (11:4, 5). The Davidic dynasty, though interrupted for centuries starting with the Babylonian Captivity, will be restored by the Messiah when He sits on David's throne in the Millennium (Ps. 89:30-37).

- 8] And at this house, *which* is high, every one that passeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss; and they shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and to this house?

This judgment would cause other peoples to marvel at and ridicule Israel. "Hiss" (1 Kgs 9:8) literally means "whistle in amazement."

- 9] And they shall answer, Because they forsook the LORD their God, who brought forth their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have taken hold upon other gods, and have worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath the LORD brought upon them all this evil.

People would know that Israel fell because of her idolatry. Not only did later kings lead Israel away from Yahweh to false gods, but also Solomon himself did (11:4-8), and the nation was on the path toward exile (2 Kgs 25:1-21).

- 10] And it came to pass at the end of twenty years, when Solomon had built the two houses, the house of the LORD, and the king's house,
- 11] (*Now* Hiram the king of Tyre had furnished Solomon with cedar trees and fir trees, and with gold, according to all his desire,) that then king Solomon gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee.

Solomon gave 20 villages in Galilee to his old friend King Hiram of Tyre. Hiram had previously given Solomon cedar and pine (cf. 5:10) and much gold as well. The amount of gold was 120 talents (9:14; ca. 9,000 pounds). It has been suggested that the Israelite treasury was at this time short of funds and that therefore these cities were given in lieu of cash settlements. They comprised the area later known as "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Mt 4:15).

12] And Hiram came out from Tyre to see the cities which Solomon had given him; and they pleased him not.

But when Hiram visited the 20 towns he was disappointed; they were apparently located near unproductive land.

13] And he said, What cities *are* these which thou hast given me, my brother? And he called them the land of Cabul unto this day.

“Cabul,” כַּבּוּל, sounds like the Hebrew for “good-for-nothing.”

14] And Hiram sent to the king sixscore talents of gold.

There is some ambiguity in this passage; evidently not all the details of the transaction between the two men are here recorded.

15] And this *is* the reason of the levy which king Solomon raised; for to build the house of the LORD, and his own house, and Millo, and the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazor, and Megiddo, and Gezer.

In addition to the temple (chapter 6) and his palace (7:1-12) Solomon built supporting terraces (probably large level areas between hills made by filling in land), and the wall of Jerusalem which he extended farther to the north, more than doubling the size of the city. His wall surrounded the temple and probably the palace which were built to the north of the old City of David. Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer were fortress cities. Hazor, north of the Sea of Kinnereth, guarded the northern part of the kingdom.

Megiddo protected the Valley of Jezreel that stretched from west to east in the central sector of Israel. The excavation of Megiddo by the University of Chicago has revealed a section of extensive stone stables from the level of Solomon’s time, large enough to house from 300 to 500 horses. Gezer served as a site of defense in western Judah where it discouraged potential southern and western aggressors from attacking Israel. Israel was stronger and wealthier under Solomon than under any of its other kings.

16] *For* Pharaoh king of Egypt had gone up, and taken Gezer, and burnt it with fire, and slain the Canaanites that dwelt in the city, and given it *for* a present unto his daughter, Solomon’s wife.

17] And Solomon built Gezer, and Bethhoron the nether,

Gezer had previously been captured and burned by Egypt’s king, its residents had been executed, and the town had been given by Pharaoh as a part of his dowry for his daughter who had married Solomon. Solomon then rebuilt and fortified Gezer. Lower Beth Horon (as well as Upper Beth Horon) and Gezer were important defense towns for protection against attacks from Israel’s southwest.

18] And Baalath, and Tadmor in the wilderness, in the land,

Baalath stood near Gezer. Tadmor (later named Palmyra) was located on a caravan route between Damascus and the Euphrates River to Israel’s NE.

19] And all the cities of store that Solomon had, and cities for his chariots, and cities for his horsemen, and that which Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion.

Solomon’s store cities, scattered throughout Israel, were fortified towns in which surplus food was stockpiled. The towns where he kept his chariots and horses were ready to defend Israel against any invader. Solomon also built up other towns throughout his kingdom for various other purposes.

20] *And* all the people *that were* left of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, which *were* not of the children of Israel,

21] Their children that were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel also were not able utterly to destroy, upon those did Solomon levy a tribute of bondservice unto this day.

Solomon used slave labor for his building projects. Solomon conscripted his forced labor from among non-Israelite population groups still living in the land. These included Hittites (originally from central Anatolia, in modern-day Turkey), Amorites (early hill-dwellers in Canaan), Perizzites (a Canaanite subtribe), Hivites (perhaps the same as the Indo-Aryan Hurrians), and Jebusites (the original Canaanite inhabitants of Jerusalem)—peoples not fully subjugated by Israel in the Conquest (Judg 3:1-6).

22] But of the children of Israel did Solomon make no bondmen: but they *were* men of war, and his servants, and his princes, and his captains, and rulers of his chariots, and his horsemen.

The descendants of the conquered native tribes did the hardest manual labor. The Israelites were exempted from such drudgery, serving instead in the army and as labor foremen.

23] These *were* the chief of the officers that *were* over Solomon’s work, five hundred and fifty, which bare rule over the people that wrought in the work.

The Israelites served as soldiers and supervisors. The 250 supervisors were only Israelites whereas the 550 officials in 1 Kgs 9:23 probably included Canaanite foremen as well. In addition to the 250 Solomon had 3,600 other foremen (2 Chr 2:18), a total of 3,850 (which equals 3,300, 1 Kgs 5:16, plus 550, 1 Kgs 9:23). The labor force was obviously very large.

1 Kings 10 Solomon's Glory

24] But Pharaoh's daughter came up out of the city of David unto her house which *Solomon* had built for her: then did he build Millo.

Solomon also built terraces by filling in land near the residence he had built for Pharaoh's daughter in his palace complex (cf. 7:8). She moved there from her other residence in the City of David after the palace was completed.

25] And three times in a year did Solomon offer burnt offerings and peace offerings upon the altar which he built unto the LORD, and he burnt incense upon the altar that *was* before the LORD. So he finished the house.

All the offerings mentioned were for worship (on the burnt offerings cf. Lev 1, and on the fellowship offerings; cf. Lev 3). The three annual occasions were perhaps the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Harvest (also called Weeks and Pentecost), and the Feast of Tabernacles (also called Ingathering) since these were the major feasts of Israel (cf. Ex 23:14-16).

26] And king Solomon made a navy of ships in Eziongeber, which *is* beside Eloth, on the shore of the Red sea, in the land of Edom.

Ezion-geber, Solomon's seaport, was situated on the eastern arm of the Red Sea, near Eilat. Archaeology has again confirmed the historicity of the Biblical record in this regard. In 1938 and 1939, under the direction of Nelson Glueck, excavators unearthed a compact but important town at the site of Ezion-geber. Glueck discovered there the smelting furnaces that were used to produce the copper for Solomon's trade. The city of Ezion-geber has often been styled the "Pittsburgh" of Biblical times.

27] And Hiram sent in the navy his servants, shipmen that had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon.

Hiram's Phoenician sailors, who joined Solomon's, were some of the most skillful of their day. Much of Solomon's prosperity was due to his maritime industry, an enterprise he was able to undertake with Phoenician help.

28] And they came to Ophir, and fetched from thence gold, four hundred and twenty talents, and brought *it* to king Solomon.

Solomon's merchant marine extended its navigation as far as Ophir. This is generally conceded to have been in southwestern Arabia (cf. 10:11; Job 22:24; 28:16), but some scholars, on the basis of the cargo mentioned in 10:22, locate it in India. [While 1 Kgs 9:28 has 420 talents (ca. 16 tons, or 32,000 pounds), 2 Chr 8:18 has 450 (ca. 17 tons). One of the two figures may be due to a copyist confusing the two similar-looking Heb. letters for 450 and 420.]

1] And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions.

Sheba is modern Yemen (not Ethiopia), in Arabia, about 1,200 miles from Jerusalem. Sheba may be the land of the Sabaeans (cf. Job 1:15; Ezek 23:42; Joel 3:8). The Sabeans over whom the queen ruled were governed by priest-kings (Ps 72:10). Solomon's expeditions to the east by sea (cf. 1 Kgs 9:26-28) would have brought him news of his prosperous and important Arabian kingdom. The queen's primary purpose in visiting Solomon seems to have been to see if he was really wise and wealthy.

2] And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart.

3] And Solomon told her all her questions: there was not *any* thing hid from the king, which he told her not.

4] And when the queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built,

5] And the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cupbearers, and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the LORD; there was no more spirit in her.

6] And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom.

7] Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen *it*: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard.

8] Happy *are* thy men, happy *are* these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, *and* that hear thy wisdom.

9] Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice.

10] And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon.

The queen was quite wealthy herself. She gave Solomon 120 talents of gold (ca. 4 1/2 tons), great quantities of spices, and precious stones (cf. v. 2).

11] And the navy also of Hiram, that brought gold from Ophir, brought in from Ophir great plenty of almug trees, and precious stones.

12] And the king made of the almug trees pillars for the house of the LORD, and for the king's house, harps also and psalteries for singers: there came no such almug trees, nor were seen unto this day.

These verses, which seem out of place here, may reflect a trade arrangement that resulted from the queen's visit. Ophir may have been close to or a part of the queen's kingdom of Sheba (cf. 9:28). Almugwood is strong, beautiful (black outside, ruby red inside), and long-lasting. Solomon used it in the temple steps (cf. 2 Chr 9:11) as well as for the other purposes mentioned here.

- 13] And king Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, beside *that* which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty. So she turned and went to her own country, she and her servants.

[This visit gives rise to the legends surrounding Menelik I, and the successive kings of Ethiopia. The tradition that the Ark was taken, leaving a replica, appears non-Biblical. However, it seems that it may indeed have been taken to Egypt and then Ethiopia during the days of Manasseh to protect it from his ravages. Cf. 2 Chr 35 and *The Seat of Mercy* for some surprising background.]

- 14] Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold,

God had told His kings not to multiply gold (Deut 17:17), but Solomon disobeyed. [This fabled number, 666, is regarded by some as a "link" (or "type") to Solomon's reign. It appears twice, and only in this regard, other than the famed Rev 13:18.]

- 15] Beside *that he had* of the merchantmen, and of the traffick of the spice merchants, and of all the kings of Arabia, and of the governors of the country.
16] And king Solomon made two hundred targets *of* beaten gold: six hundred *shekels* of gold went to one target.
17] And *he made* three hundred shields *of* beaten gold; three pound of gold went to one shield: and the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon.

The House of the Forest of Lebanon (cf. 7:2-5; 10:21) must have served as an armory among other things. Each large shield was made of 600 bekas (7 1/2 pounds) of gold and each small shield had three minas (3 3/4 pounds) of gold. (In 2 Chr 9:16 the small shields are said to be made of 300 bekas of gold. But that is the same amount expressed in a different unit of measure.) Evidently these 500 shields were intended for parade use rather than for battle as gold is a soft metal.

- 18] Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the best gold.
19] The throne had six steps, and the top of the throne *was* round behind: and *there were* stays on either side on the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the stays.
20] And twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps: there was not the like made in any kingdom.

The 12 lions, one on each end of the six steps to the throne, may have been intended to represent the 12 tribes of Israel.

- 21] And all king Solomon's drinking vessels *were of* gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon *were of* pure gold; none *were of* silver: it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon.
22] For the king had at sea a navy of Tharshish with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tharshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks.

Solomon's fleet of traders brought riches from distant lands. The apes and baboons ("peacocks?") may have been pets in vogue at the time. Tharshish ("Tharshish") is a mystery: a Sanscrit or Aryan word, meaning "the sea coast." A sea coast or island (Isa 23:6; Jer 10:9; Ezek 27:12; Jon 1:3; 4:2), west of Palestine (cf. Gen 10:4; 1 Chr 1:7), but mistakenly located in 2 Chronicles 9:21 on the coast of the Red Sea. Beaten silver (Jer 10:9), silver, iron tin, and lead were brought from there by the people of Tyre (Ezek 27:12). Tharshish is associated with an island (Isa 23:6; 66:19) and Jonah attempted to go there by ship (Jon 1:3). Solomon also sent ships there (2 Chr 9:21). But the identification is not at all clear. Some scholars put forward Tartarus in southern Spain, to which, according to the classical authorities, the Phoenicians sailed with their ships to obtain silver, iron and tin. Josephus' identification with Tarsus in Cilicia (*Antiq.* i, 127; ix, 208) is accepted by many scholars today.

Some associate it with Britannia (as a source of tin (Ezek 27:12)); others with India. It was to this port Jonah's ship was about to sail from Joppa. It is the subject of many conjectures because of its prophetic allusion in Ezek 38:13.

- 23] So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom.
24] And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart.
25] And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments, and armour, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year.
26] And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he bestowed in the cities for chariots, and with the king at Jerusalem.

Chariots were the most effective and dreaded military machines of that day. Their mobility and versatility gave Israel a great military advantage and discouraged enemies from invading the wealthy nation. Solomon's chariot cities, some have suggested, were Gezer, Hazor, and Megiddo. It has been said that little things portray the true character of a man more certainly than great ones. A casual reader might see little significance in the king's assembling horses. However, the Mosaic law, in anticipation of the monarchy, particularly forbade the king of Israel to amass horses from Egypt

(Deut 17:16). The fact that Egypt has not been known for breeding horses presents some difficulty here. He purchased horses from Egypt; (some take the Hebrew word translated “Egypt” as, in reality, a place in Cilicia—Musr) and from Kue (probably Cilicia in modern-day Turkey). The horses may have been bred in Cilicia, and Egypt may have been the trader. The Hittites and Syrians also supplied the market.

- 27] And the king made silver *to be* in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he *to be* as the sycamore trees that *are* in the vale, for abundance.
- 28] And Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt, and linen yarn: the king’s merchants received the linen yarn at a price.
- 29] And a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred *shekels* of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty: and so for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, did they bring *them* out by their means.

He bought a chariot for 600 silver shekels (ca. 15 pounds) and a horse cost 150 silver shekels (ca. 3 3/4 pounds). In exporting some of them to the Hittites and the Arameans he presumably made a significant profit on them. Though Solomon’s wealth enabled him to purchase large quantities of horses and chariots, this practice was specifically prohibited in the Mosaic Law (Deut 17:16). The reason for this prohibition was that the Lord wanted His people to depend on Him for their protection. The presence of strong physical defenses in Israel turned the hearts of Solomon and the people away from the Lord with a false sense of security. As is often the case, an abundance of material benefits leads people to think they have no needs when in reality their need for God never diminishes.

1 Kings 11 Solomon’s Apostasy

- 1] But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, *and* Hittites;
- 2] Of the nations *concerning* which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: *for* surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love.

He disobeyed the Mosaic regulations for the king prophetically viewed in the Deuteronomic code in regard to the multiplication of horses (Deut 17:16), of foreign women (17:17), and of gold (17:17). Although the three sins of this monarch, taken separately or even weighed together, may not be nearly as glaring as the one great sin of his father, yet they were sins that drew his heart away from the living God. Furthermore, there is no written indication that he ever repented of them.

- 3] And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart.
- 4] For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, *that* his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as *was* the heart of David his father.

This is precisely what happened to Solomon. His palace apparently included a harem; he had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Solomon’s pagan wives led him into idolatry just as God had warned (Ex 23:31-33; 34:15-16; Deut 7:1-4). Solomon did not abandon Yahweh but he worshiped other gods as well. His heart was not fully devoted to the LORD; he compromised his affections. Apparently he concluded that since he was a great king he should live like the other great kings of the world even though it meant disobeying God’s Word. As Solomon grew older he got farther away from God (cf. 1 Kgs 11:33).

- 5] For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.

Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians, a Canaanite deity connected with the fertility cult. The name is cognate with the Babylonian *Ishtar*, the goddess of sexual love, maternity, and fertility. This goddess is among the best known of the fertility cult goddess.

Milcom is another form of *Malcham*, sometimes identified with *Molech* or *Moloch*, the chief god of Moab and Ammon, to whom some Israelites sacrificed their infants in the valley of Hinnom. So ensnared in the practice of idolatry did Solomon become that he built a high place for this evil deity. The worship of Molech was stringently prohibited by law (Lev 18:21; 20:1-5). Molech demanded the rite of human sacrifice, especially of little children. His worship was utterly desecrated by the good king Josiah.

- 6] And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as *did* David his father.
- 7] Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that *is* before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon.

Chemosh, the national deity of the Moabites, was “twin brother” to Moloch of the Ammonites—equally cruel, licentious, and vulgar in his demands. The hill east of Jerusalem on which Solomon built high places may have been the Mount of Olives (cf. 2 Kgs 23:13).

- 8] And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods.
- 9] And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice,

- 10] And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the LORD commanded.

The reason for God's judgment of Solomon is clear: his heart had turned away from the LORD (cf. v. 4). Solomon's great sin was a change in his attitude toward God (v. 11). This happened despite the two times God had revealed Himself to Solomon, making promises to him (3:5; 9:2).

- 11] Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant.

His decision to pursue other gods led to his disobeying (11:10) God's specific command against idolatry (9:6-7). One of Solomon's subordinates (11:11) was Jeroboam, who tore the kingdom from Solomon's son.

- 12] Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: *but* I will rend it out of the hand of thy son.
13] Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; *but* will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen.

The one tribe that God left in Rehoboam's hand was Judah. Actually two tribes were left (Judah and Benjamin) but Benjamin was small and the two became known as the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The tribe of Simeon had been given territory south of Judah but later at least part of Simeon moved north (see comments on Josh 19:1-9). It was for David's sake that God tempered His judgment with mercy, and did not allow the split in Solomon's day. Whereas David had sinned against God deliberately, his heart remained devoted to the Lord. That is why his sin was not so serious as Solomon's. The greatest commandment is to love God with all one's heart (Deut. 6:5).

Adversaries Arose

Three strong adversaries arose:

- 1) Hadad, a prince of the royal house of Edom, had escaped Joab's massacre and fled with some of his followers to Egypt, where he was treated kindly by the Pharaoh. Now, apparently for no valid reason but through the providential leading of God, he requested and obtained permission from Pharaoh to return home. Back in Israel, he proved to be a thorn in the side of Solomon (vv. 14-22).
- 2) Rezon of Damascus, the son of Eliada, after the defeat of his master, Hadadezer (2 Sam 8:3-8, 10), became a freebooter with a party of bandits that harassed the countryside. Shortly after David's death he seized the

city of Damascus, no doubt by a surprise attack. From this position Solomon could not expel him. Little by little Rezon became an increasing threat as he dominated the trade routes to the East (vv. 23-25).

3) Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, of the tribe of Ephraim, became the internal adversary of Solomon. A young man of considerable ability and talent, he soon attracted the attention of the king (v. 28), who made him overseer of his public works.

- 14] And the LORD stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite: he *was* of the king's seed in Edom.
15] For it came to pass, when David was in Edom, and Joab the captain of the host was gone up to bury the slain, after he had smitten every male in Edom;
16] (For six months did Joab remain there with all Israel, until he had cut off every male in Edom:)

The ancient hostility of the Edomites toward the Israelites must have been aggravated in Hadad's mind by David's slaughter of the Edomites, and Hadad lived for the day he could take revenge.

- 17] That Hadad fled, he and certain Edomites of his father's servants with him, to go into Egypt; Hadad *being* yet a little child.
18] And they arose out of Midian, and came to Paran: and they took men with them out of Paran, and they came to Egypt, unto Pharaoh king of Egypt; which gave him an house, and appointed him victuals, and gave him land.
19] And Hadad found great favour in the sight of Pharaoh, so that he gave him to wife the sister of his own wife, the sister of Tahpenes the queen.
20] And the sister of Tahpenes bare him Genubath his son, whom Tahpenes weaned in Pharaoh's house: and Genubath was in Pharaoh's household among the sons of Pharaoh.
21] And when Hadad heard in Egypt that David slept with his fathers, and that Joab the captain of the host was dead, Hadad said to Pharaoh, Let me depart, that I may go to mine own country.

Hearing that David had died (in 971 B.C.) and that Joab was also dead Hadad asked Pharaoh for permission to go back to Edom. Apparently he caused trouble for Solomon militarily (cf. v. 25).

- 22] Then Pharaoh said unto him, But what hast thou lacked with me, that, behold, thou seekest to go to thine own country? And he answered, Nothing: howbeit let me go in any wise.
23] And God stirred him up *another* adversary, Rezon the son of Eliadah, which fled from his lord Hadadezer king of Zobah:

Another enemy of Solomon was the rebel Rezon. He was from Zobah, a kingdom just south of Damascus (cf. 2 Sam. 8:3-6). Rezon went with some other rebels to Damascus, the capital of Aram, and took control there.

- 24] And he gathered men unto him, and became captain over a band, when David slew them *of Zobah*: and they went to Damascus, and dwelt therein, and reigned in Damascus.
- 25] And he was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon, beside the mischief that Hadad *did*: and he abhorred Israel, and reigned over Syria.
- 26] And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite of Zereda, Solomon's servant, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow woman, even he lifted up *his* hand against the king.
- 27] And this *was* the cause that he lifted up *his* hand against the king: Solomon built Millo, *and* repaired the breaches of the city of David his father. Apparently he had worked for Solomon when the king built the supporting terraces and filled in the gap in the wall of the City of David.
- 28] And the man Jeroboam *was* a mighty man of valour: and Solomon seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph.

As a result of his good work Solomon promoted him over the whole forced labor force of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (the house of Joseph).

- 29] And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they two *were* alone in the field:
- 30] And Ahijah caught the new garment that *was* on him, and rent it *in* twelve pieces:
- 31] And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee:

Ahijah the prophet (who was sought out later by Jeroboam, 14:1-18) graphically demonstrated to Jeroboam the division of the kingdom by tearing his own new cloak in 12 pieces and giving 10 to Jeroboam. This must have impressed Jeroboam greatly.

- 32] (But he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel:)

The one tribe to be left with Solomon was Judah. Actually two were left—Judah and Benjamin—which were often regarded as one tribe and referred to as Judah.

- 33] Because that they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways, to do *that which is* right in mine eyes, and to *keep* my statutes and my judgments, as *did* David his father.

This portrayal by Ahijah demonstrated what God had said earlier to Solomon (vv. 11-13). Not only Solomon but also the people of Israel (“they”) had forsaken Yahweh by worshiping idols.

- 34] Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand: but I will make him prince all the days of his life for David my servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept my commandments and my statutes:
- 35] But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it unto thee, *even* ten tribes.
- 36] And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light alway before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there.

Literally, *that there may be a light to my servant David*. God's purpose would be carried out despite Solomon's disobedience. Like a lamp kept burning perpetually in a tent or home, Judah would be a perpetual testimony to God's choice of David, who was of the tribe of Judah (cf. 15:4; 2 Sam 21:17; 2 Kgs 8:19). The house of David would be disciplined but not destroyed. Solomon indeed had proved to be a sinner; yet through the line of David, Christ, the Saviour of sinners, should appear.

- 37] And I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel. Jeroboam was told that he would rule over all that his heart desired in Israel, that is, he would have freedom to rule as he saw fit.
- 38] And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do *that is* right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee.

It is remarkable that God's conditional promise to establish Jeroboam's line was similar to His unconditional promise to establish David's line (v. 38). Unfortunately Jeroboam did not value this promise but forfeited it. How different might have been the personal history of Jeroboam, as well as the subsequent history of his kingdom, if he had obeyed the Lord's voice! This man, however, gained the unenviable epithet, “who caused Israel to sin.”

- 39] And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever.

God said that He would humble David's descendants but not forever. This ending of the humbling was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ, David's greatest Son (i.e., Descendant). All that Ahijah prophesied came to pass.

- 40] Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam. And Jeroboam arose, and fled into Egypt, unto Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon.

The reason Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam is not stated. Perhaps Jeroboam tried to take matters into his own hands and seize the kingdom. Or he may have done something else that made it necessary for him to flee to Shishak the king (Pharaoh) of Egypt (cf. Hadad's escape to Egypt,

vv. 14-22). Shishak (945-924), also known as Sheshonk I, later invaded Judah (2 Chr 12:2-4) and Jerusalem (1 Kgs 14:25-26) in Rehoboam's reign.

- 41] And the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, *are they* not written in the book of the acts of Solomon?

The writer was led by the Spirit of God to record no more events of Solomon's reign though others were preserved in the book of the annals of Solomon, which is not extant today. This is the first of several such sources mentioned in 1 Kgs (cf. 14:19, 29) and 2 Chr (cf. 2 Chr 9:29; 12:15; 26:22; 32:32).

- 42] And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel *was* forty years.

The actual time of Solomon's reign was forty-two years, though part of this must be reckoned as the time of his coregency with David.

- 43] And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead.

Solomon reigned for 40 years (971-931 B.C.). His life ended in tragedy. He was greatly blessed by God but he allowed God's gifts to dominate his affections. The fault lay not with God for giving Solomon so much, but with Solomon who, though he had the wisdom to deal with such temptations, chose to set his affections *on the gifts and not on the Giver*. The man best qualified to live life successfully chose not to do so. How are *you* doing? Success in life in the eyes of God does not come automatically with the possession of wisdom but with the application of wisdom to one's life. ***Spiritual success depends not only on insight but also on choices.***

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) Highlight the occasions where God appeared to Solomon. What were the conditions and how were they fulfilled?
- 2) What were the three main sins of Solomon? What were the results?
- 3) What were the predominant pagan idolatries prevalent in Solomon's time and how did they differ? What are their counterparts today?
- 4) What were the three main adversaries that rose against Solomon in 1 Kings 11?

Discussion Questions

("Where two people agree, one is redundant.")

- 1) How do the conditions God announced to Solomon impact current events today?

- 2) Contrast the reigns and legacy of David vs. Solomon. Which was best, worst, and the prophetic impacts remaining?
- 3) Is your life a growing commitment to God, or on a Solomon-like decline?
- 4) Discuss the implications of "finishing well."

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Explore the relationship of the visit of the Queen of Sheba and the traditions of Ethiopia to this day. Relate this to the episode with the Ethiopian Treasurer in Acts 8.
- 2) Explore the potential identities of Tarshish and their prophetic implications.
- 3) Is there a mystical (or "typical") relationship between the 666 of Revelation and the 666 of 1 Kings 10:13?

Preparation for Next Session:

The fatal division of the kingdom of Israel into two nations resulted from a foolish decision by Solomon's son, Rehoboam. However, the tribes that separated had a long history of antagonism that had threatened for many years to split Israel. Judah, the largest tribe in population, enjoyed prominence as the leader of the other tribes in the wilderness march. Judah received the largest area in the Promised Land because of its large population. But Ephraim was the preferred son of Joseph, and though that tribe was not large, it demonstrated a feeling of superiority on occasion (cf. Judg 9:1-3).

The Northern tribes led by Ephraim separated from their brethren to the south briefly during David's reign (2 Sam 19:41-20:22), so a fault line had developed between these two groups of tribes that opened up and split the monarchy at this stressful time in its history. Read chapters 12-22 as preparation for the next four sessions on the divided kingdom.

Session 5 1 Kings 12 - 14 The Divided Kingdom

The division of David and Solomon's United Kingdom into two often hostile nations was truly one of history's turning points. In looking at

the text which describes the division, we sense the spiritual apostasy which was part and parcel of the founding of the Northern realm, Israel. In the entire history of the North, there is no godly king. In the history of the South, a kingdom known as Judah, there were only a few. Yet the kings in the Southern line were all descendants of David, for God's covenant-promise to Israel's greatest king was faithfully kept. This era marks development of the prophetic ministry. Increasingly, prophets played a role in speaking out about the sins of the nation, and in calling God's people back to the Lord. Both North and South knew the ministry of these "men of God."

1 Kings 12 Rehoboam's Dilemma

- 1] And Rehoboam went to Shechem: for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king.

Rehoboam, who is the only son of Solomon mentioned in Scripture, had doubtless been appointed by his father to succeed him and Shechem afforded a fitting site for the coronation of a king of Israel:

- At Shechem Yahweh first appeared to Abraham in the land and promised to give him all of Canaan (Gen 12:6-7).
- Jacob later settled there (Gen 33:18-20) and Joseph was buried there (Josh 24:32).
- After they had entered the Promised Land the Israelites, at Shechem in the valley between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, dedicated themselves to keep the Mosaic Law (Josh 24:1-27).
- This sacred spot now reminded the Israelites of their divinely revealed destiny as a nation and of God's faithfulness.

- 2] And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was yet in Egypt, heard *of it*, (for he was fled from the presence of king Solomon, and Jeroboam dwelt in Egypt:)
- 3] That they sent and called him. And Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came, and spake unto Rehoboam, saying,

Evidently the heads of the Northern tribes under the leadership of the Ephraimites sent for Jeroboam, who apparently had just returned from exile in Egypt after Solomon's death (cf. 11:40).

- 4] Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee.

They wanted him to present their plea for lower taxes to Rehoboam. They did this sometime during the coronation festivities.

- 5] And he said unto them, Depart yet *for* three days, then come again to me. And the people departed.

Perhaps Jeroboam served as their spokesman. Jeroboam had, of course, been told by the Prophet Ahijah that the kingdom would be divided and that he would rule 10 of the tribes (11:31-39). But he seems to have decided to let events take their course rather than initiating an unprovoked revolution. By reducing the tax load and by lightening the labor conscription requirements on his people, King Rehoboam could have won the support of his petitioners. But he said that he wanted three days to think about their suggestion.

Rehoboam's Counselors

- 6] And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men, that stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, How do ye advise that I may answer this people?
- 7] And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever.

The king asked two groups of counselors for their advice. The elders were probably about the same age as his father Solomon, having served as the former king's official advisers; they were elders both by reason of years and by their office in the government. This group's counsel was wise—to lighten the tax and work load, as the people asked. If taken, this advice would have resulted in peace, at least for a time.

- 8] But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, *and* which stood before him:
- 9] And he said unto them, What counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying, Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us lighter?
- 10] And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou *it* lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little *finger* shall be thicker than my father's loins.

The younger men's counsel was the opposite from what the elders had given, but just what Rehoboam wanted to hear. The wording of Rehoboam's reply to his petitioners, as suggested by his younger advisers, seems almost designed to provoke hostility: he would be far more harsh than his father, for his little finger was thicker than his father's waist (an obvious hyperbole intended to express his greater power).

- 11] And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.

The king was no child at this time; he was 41 years old (14:21). Nor was his decision made on the spur of the moment; he had three days to think it over (12:5). It was a deliberate choice possibly based on what he believed was needed most in the nation at that time. Perhaps the king and his counselors thought intimidation would send the potential rebels scurrying for cover and would drive any ideas of insurrection far from their minds. A “whip” was a plain leather strap. A “scorpion” was a whip with barbed points or tips of steel imbedded in it, used in the castigation of slaves.

Rehoboam’s Decision

- 12] So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had appointed, saying, Come to me again the third day.
13] And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men’s counsel that they gave him;
14] And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father *also* chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.

The king followed through with his decision and delivered his insulting threat to his petitioners. Rather than listening to the people Rehoboam put his own interests first.

- 15] Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the LORD, that he might perform his saying, which the LORD spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

This turn of events, the writer noted, was from the LORD in fulfillment of His prophecy through Ahijah (11:31-39). God’s judgment because of Solomon’s apostasy was being carried out (11:11-13).

Israel’s Rebellion

- 16] So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither *have we* inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents.

Rehoboam’s insensitivity to the Israelites’ hardships extinguished any hope they may have entertained of economic recovery. His dictatorial threat alienated his suffering subjects. Then and there they seceded and broke the union of the 12 tribes. Thus the suzerainty of the Davidic house was repudiated by the majority of Israel.

“To your tents, O Israel”: The reply of the Israelites evidently had become a battle cry; it was used years earlier by Sheba who rebelled against David (2 Sam 20:1). With these words, they turned their backs on their heritage to seek out new paths with their newly chosen leader, Jeroboam, the son of Nebat.

- 17] But *as for* the children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them.
18] Then king Rehoboam sent Adoram, who *was* over the tribute; and all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died. Therefore king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem.

What could have motivated Rehoboam to send Adoniram (a variant spelling of the Heb. Adoram), the personification of oppression, (the foreman of forced labor), to meet with the rebels at that crucial moment? Perhaps Adoniram was the best-qualified ambassador. Whatever the reason, Rehoboam’s “wisdom” proved foolish again. Adoniram died as the target of the rebels’ wrath. And Rehoboam barely escaped with his own life.

- 19] So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day.

What should have been a glorious national celebration (v. 1) turned into a humiliating rout for Judah’s new king who fled his own coronation to escape assassination by his infuriated subjects. The writer noted that the Israelites were really rebelling against the house of David, God’s appointed dynasty, which they did “unto this day” (i.e., the time this section of the book was written).

- 20] And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only.

Rehoboam’s coronation turned into Jeroboam’s coronation. The people brought Jeroboam forward and made him king then and there. This action suggests that plotting had been involved in the rebellion. Only Judah (and Benjamin, v. 21) remained loyal to the ruler from David’s house (dynasty).

Rehoboam’s Reprisal

- 21] And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah, with the tribe of Benjamin, an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam the son of Solomon.

Having failed to preserve unity through diplomacy Rehoboam sought to restore it by force. The tribe of Benjamin was Judah’s immediate

neighbor to the north. The capital city of Jerusalem lay almost on the Judah-Benjamin border. Probably for the sake of their close neighbors and the capital, the Benjamites sided with Judah. Together these tribes called up 180,000 soldiers to fight their brothers in the 10 tribes to the north.

- 22] But the word of God came unto Shemaiah the man of God, saying,
23] Speak unto Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and unto all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people, saying,
24] Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me. They hearkened therefore to the word of the LORD, and returned to depart, according to the word of the LORD.

The man of God made a public announcement that civil war was definitely not God's will and he convinced Rehoboam and the people to go back home. To his credit Rehoboam obeyed the word of the LORD and did not proceed into battle. Again the writer pointed out the overruling hand of God in these affairs (as the LORD had ordered, v. 24; cf. v. 15).

Jeroboam's Evil Reign in Israel

Jeroboam could have been an instrument of blessing for Israel. He was divinely chosen and given promises that his dynasty would continue and prosper if he obeyed the Lord (11:38-39). But Jeroboam did not trust or obey the Lord; he committed many serious sins that resulted in the Israelites turning *from* God rather than *to* Him. He planted seeds that bore bitter fruit for Israel as long as it continued as a nation. Twenty kings ruled the Northern Kingdom and not one of them turned the people back to the Lord. Instead of one stable dynasty, Israel experienced several dynasties.

Jeroboam's Idolatry

- 25] Then Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and went out from thence, and built Peniel.

Jeroboam chose Shechem (where Rehoboam had been crowned, v. 1) as his capital and began at once to fortify it as his stronghold. During its history the Northern Kingdom had three capitals: Shechem, Tirzah (14:17; 15:33), and Samaria (16:23-24). Jeroboam also built up Peniel as a fortress east of the Jordan River, probably to protect Israel from invasion from the east by the Gileadites, who had been consistently loyal to David.

- 26] And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David:

This may be viewed as Jeroboam's first act of infidelity to Jehovah. He had already been given assurance that the Lord would build him a sure

house. But because he did not trust God's word, he resorted to this measure of religious apostasy—the religious as well as political separation of the two kingdoms.

- 27] If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, *even* unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.

Jeroboam's musings reveal an evil heart of unbelief. Rather than believing God's promise to establish his dynasty (cf. 11:31, 37-38), the king sought security by turning the people away from God. Fear for his personal safety crept in when he stopped trusting God.

- 28] Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves *of* gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

The king's "reforms" all involved religious apostasy. This is why he was such an evil influence in Israel. His changes struck at the heart of Israel's strength, her relationship with God. They polluted Israel for generations. Jeroboam researched his ideas; he sought advice about how to maintain the secession effectively. The first change involved new religious symbols. To prevent the Israelites from returning to their magnificent temple and the ark in Jerusalem (cf. v. 27) Jeroboam offered substitute objects: two golden calves or bulls. Perhaps he actually intended the people to turn from worshipping Yahweh to worshipping his golden idols. His words suggest this.

- 29] And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan.
30] And this thing became a sin: for the people went *to worship* before the one, *even* unto Dan.

New sanctuaries were also built to house these calves to replace the temple that contained the ark with its golden cherubim. These were located in the towns of Dan in far northern Israel and Bethel just north of the Judean border in southern Israel.

The people were told to conduct pilgrimages to these places rather than traveling to Jerusalem. Thus the Israelites could find a sense of fulfillment in going through similar forms of worship (rituals) though they were being disobedient to God.

- 31] And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi.

New priests were appointed from all sorts of people rather than from the Levites as God had directed. Jeroboam dismissed the Levitical priests *who then migrated to Judah* (2 Chr 11:14). The new priests conducted

religious rites for the people at shrines Jeroboam built at various high places convenient to them.

Summary

This false religious system had a dual impact on the Northern Kingdom, Israel. First, the godly slipped over into Judah and settled there, so they could worship the Lord as He had commanded. These immigrants were a significant number. At the time of the division Judah was able to mobilize only 180,000 men (2 Chr 11:1). But just 18 years later, Judah's army entered the field with 400,000 fighting men (2 Chr 13:2). [This punctures the myths about "10 Lost Tribes." See our addenda to our *Expositional Commentary on the Book of Joshua* for a detailed discussion.]

A second impact was on the character of the Northern Kingdom. The first king made a conscious and overtly rebellious decision to break with God and His Law. Each succeeding king continued in the pattern Jeroboam set! Israel, with only 19 kings during its brief existence, had nine different dynasties. Only eight kings died a natural death. Seven were assassinated, one was a suicide, one was killed in battle, one died of injuries suffered in a fall, and the last king, Hoshea, simply disappeared into captivity. The Bible says that they all "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord."

With this kind of leadership, no wonder the people who remained in the apostate kingdom quickly fell into Baal worship and all sorts of injustice. God continued to send prophets to speak to Israel, but kings and people continued to resent the prophets' ministries and to reject their messages. After a stormy history—during which Israel, however, did know material prosperity under strong rulers such as Jeroboam II and Omri (who established Israel's capital at Samaria)—Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. The city of Samaria was totally destroyed and the people of Israel were deported. The Northern Kingdom disappeared from history; only the families who had settled in Judah kept the identity of the 10 tribes alive.

- 32] And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that *is* in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made.

Jeroboam instituted a new festival like the festival held in Judah, a carefully designed counterfeit of the Day of Atonement. Israel's festival was held in Bethel and in the eighth month (October-November) exactly one month later than Judah's, a month of Jeroboam's own choosing. Priests, sacrifices, and an altar were all provided to make Israel's festival just

as good as if not "better" than Judah's. But Israel's feast was designed by Jeroboam whereas Judah's feasts had been decreed by God.

- 33] So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month, *even* in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense.

Jeroboam set the example for his people; he personally went up to the altar at Bethel to make offerings.

1 Kings 13 The Man of God from Judah

Jeroboam's idolatrous system of worship (12:28-33) was soon condemned by a prophet of the Lord. This man's experiences point out the evil of what Jeroboam did and how deceptive it was. Then the prophet himself fell into a trap in an incident that confuses most readers.

- 1] And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense.

The mission of this anonymous man of God had its origin in the word of the LORD (vv. 1-2, 9); this was a prophecy of judgment fully authorized by God. The prophet was sent from the Southern Kingdom of Judah to Bethel, one of the two centers of Jeroboam's calf worship, to administer a stinging rebuke and to announce doom.

- 2] And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee.
- 3] And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This *is* the sign which the LORD hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that *are* upon it shall be poured out.

He uttered his prophecy publicly at the altar as Jeroboam was standing near it offering a sacrifice. This man's prophecy is one of the most remarkable in Scripture because it predicted the name and actions of a king *who would not appear on the scene for 290 years*. Josiah, who reigned from 640 to 609 B.C., fulfilled this prophecy just as the man of God predicted. (For the remarkable fulfillment of this prediction see 2 Kings 23:15-20. Josiah demolished the Bethel altar built by Jeroboam and slaughtered the false priests there.) A sign was often given in prophecies of this kind when the fulfillment would take place many years later. The man of God predicted that the

sign, a miracle to verify the prophecy, would be performed then. The sign, he said, was that the altar would split apart that very day (cf. 1 Kgs 13:5).

- 4] And it came to pass, when king Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, which had cried against the altar in Bethel, that he put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him.

Jeroboam's reaction to the prophecy was to order the arrest of the prophet. When the king's outstretched hand, symbolizing his authority, withered, this illustrated that God's authority was greater than Jeroboam's. God could paralyze Jeroboam's might and render it completely useless.

- 5] The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD.

The sign (the altar splitting apart; cf. v. 3) also left no doubt in the minds of those present that the prophecy came from the God who controlled Jeroboam and who would judge his wickedness.

- 6] And the king answered and said unto the man of God, Intreat now the face of the LORD thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again. And the man of God besought the LORD, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as *it was* before.

The king acknowledged God's power and asked the man of God to ask God to restore his hand, which God graciously did. Jeroboam referred to Yahweh as your God, not "my God," thereby testifying to his own idolatry.

- 7] And the king said unto the man of God, Come home with me, and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward.

Jeroboam's invitation may have been designed to serve a twofold purpose: it may have been in the nature of an apology for attempting arrest; and it may have been a device for warding off or at least softening the judgment pronounced upon the royal household.

- 8] And the man of God said unto the king, If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place:

But the man of God wanted no treaty with wicked Jeroboam. He had been instructed by God not to accept even a meal, which would have placed him in Jeroboam's debt.

- 9] For so was it charged me by the word of the LORD, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest.

- 10] So he went another way, and returned not by the way that he came to Bethel.

Returning home by a different route would have further illustrated the official nature of the prophet's visit; this was not a pleasure trip, but he was in Bethel on business for God. So far so good: the prophet had obeyed God faithfully *up to this point*.

- 11] Now there dwelt an old prophet in Bethel; and his sons came and told him all the works that the man of God had done that day in Bethel: the words which he had spoken unto the king, them they told also to their father.

A second prophet was living in Bethel and was old. This man's complacency is further suggested by his willingness not only to live in the territory of the apostate king but at the very center of the king's false system of worship. What the king, with all his riches, fame, and glory, could not accomplish in the life of the man of God, a believer obviously not having "the mind of the Spirit," was now able to accomplish. The sons of the old prophet at Bethel told their father about the prophecy that had been made against Jeroboam.

- 12] And their father said unto them, What way went he? For his sons had seen what way the man of God went, which came from Judah.

- 13] And he said unto his sons, Saddle me the ass. So they saddled him the ass: and he rode thereon,

- 14] And went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak: and he said unto him, *Art* thou the man of God that camest from Judah? And he said, *I am*.

Acting upon their report, the old prophet went forth to seek the man of God, and he found him under the oak or terebinth tree. Why the old prophet rode after the prophet from Judah is not stated. Perhaps his motive from the beginning could have been jealousy and his intent could have been to destroy the younger prophet's ministry.

- 15] Then he said unto him, Come home with me, and eat bread.

- 16] And he said, I may not return with thee, nor go in with thee: neither will I eat bread nor drink water with thee in this place:

- 17] For it was said to me by the word of the LORD, Thou shalt eat no bread nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest.

- 18] He said unto him, *I am* a prophet also as thou *art*; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. *But* he lied unto him.

This circuitous mode of speaking, instead of simply saying, "the LORD spake to me," was adopted to hide an equivocation, to conceal a double meaning—an inferior sense given to the word "angel"—to offer a *seemingly superior* authority to persuade the prophet, while really the authority was secretly known to the speaker to be *inferior*.

The “angel,” that is, “messenger,” was his own sons, who were worshippers, perhaps priests, at Beth-el. As this man was governed by self-interest, and *wished to curry favor with the king* (whose purpose to adhere to his religious polity, he feared, might be shaken by the portents that had occurred), his hastening after the prophet of Judah, the deception he practiced, and the urgent invitation by which, on the ground of a falsehood, he prevailed on the too facile man of God to accompany him back to his house in Beth-el, *may have been to create an impression in the king’s mind that he was an impostor*, who acted in opposition to his own statement. A practical lesson to be learned is that the advice of other men, no matter if they are Christian friends, should not be substituted for the clear call of duty within our own hearts.

19] So he went back with him, and did eat bread in his house, and drank water.

So the prophet of Judah, not suspecting that the old prophet was lying to him returned to Bethel and ate with him. The apostasy of Jeroboam had infected even an old prophet who seems to have had the same selfish motives and practiced the same brazen disobedience as the king. The spirit of apostasy was spreading quickly and was already reaping a grim harvest in Israel.

20] And it came to pass, as they sat at the table, that the word of the LORD came unto the prophet that brought him back:

The prophet who had been willing to assume the role of the tempter, now, by God’s urgency, assumed the more difficult role of the announcer of punishment. Even though the old prophet had sinned, the word of the LORD came to him again, as it did to many other prophets of the Lord who sinned (e.g., Jonah, Elijah).

21] And he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the LORD, and hast not kept the commandment which the LORD thy God commanded thee,

22] But camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place, of the which *the LORD* did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers.

The old man announced the fate of his brother prophet then and there. The younger prophet, because he had disobeyed the Lord’s command, would not be given an honorable burial. [The severity of God’s judgment on this man, compared with His dealings with the older prophet who was also disobedient, seems unfair. But the severity of God’s judgment was proportionate to the importance of the younger man’s mission. All Israel would have heard about his prophecy of God’s judgment on Jeroboam

for his disobedience to the word of the Lord through Moses. If God had not judged His own prophet for *his* disobedience to the word given him by God and which he had announced publicly, doubt would have been cast on his prophecy and on God’s credibility. By comparison the older prophet’s sins were private and were judged privately by God.]

23] And it came to pass, after he had eaten bread, and after he had drunk, that he saddled for him the ass, *to wit*, for the prophet whom he had brought back.

24] And when he was gone, a lion met him by the way, and slew him: and his carcase was cast in the way, and the ass stood by it, the lion also stood by the carcase.

Lions still prowled the forest around Bethel and once in a while accosted an unwary traveler (cf. Judg 14:5). However, in order that it might be known that this was indeed a supernatural judgment and not simply an unfortunate accident, the lion, after slaying the prophet, did not harm or tear his body, nor did he even kill the meek donkey upon which the prophet had been riding, but calmly stood at attention, as if by divine arrest.

25] And, behold, men passed by, and saw the carcase cast in the way, and the lion standing by the carcase: and they came and told *it* in the city where the old prophet dwelt.

26] And when the prophet that brought him back from the way heard *thereof*, he said, *It is* the man of God, who was disobedient unto the word of the LORD: therefore the LORD hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him, and slain him, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake unto him.

Though the lying prophet suffered no corporeal punishment, his pangs of conscience must have been severe when he realized that he had brought about the death of a man by urging him to pursue a course of disobedience.

27] And he spake to his sons, saying, Saddle me the ass. And they saddled *him*.

28] And he went and found his carcase cast in the way, and the ass and the lion standing by the carcase: the lion had not eaten the carcase, nor torn the ass.

29] And the prophet took up the carcase of the man of God, and laid it upon the ass, and brought it back: and the old prophet came to the city, to mourn and to bury him.

30] And he laid his carcase in his own grave; and they mourned over him, *saying*, Alas, my brother!

Out of reverence for the man of God the old prophet picked up his body, mourned for him, and buried him in his own tomb.

31] And it came to pass, after he had buried him, that he spake to his sons, saying, When I am dead, then bury me in the sepulchre wherein the man of God *is* buried; lay my bones beside his bones:

32] For the saying which he cried by the word of the LORD against the altar in Bethel, and against all the houses of the high places which *are* in the cities of Samaria, shall surely come to pass.

He was convinced the prophecy about Josiah would come to pass (cf. v. 2). This story clarifies the importance of consistent and complete obedience to the Word of God, the lesson God was seeking to impress on Jeroboam and His people at that time. It also illustrates that *added privilege brings increased responsibility*; God dealt with the prophet who had the greater responsibility more severely than he did with the man who had less. The effects of spiritual apostasy even on God's servants can be seen too, especially in the behavior of the older prophet.

Jeroboam's Persistent Apostasy

- 33] After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became *one* of the priests of the high places.
- 34] And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut *it* off, and to destroy *it* from off the face of the earth.

That the preceding incident was intended to teach Jeroboam and the Israelites the danger of disregarding the word of the Lord seems clear from this brief passage. The king's sins had been recounted (12:25-33), then he was warned (13:1-32), but still Jeroboam did not change his evil ways. Though the appointing of just anyone to the priestly office is singled out (v. 33; cf. 12:31) and was perhaps the most serious aspect of his apostasy, it was his total disregard for the will of God as expressed in the Law of Moses that resulted in Jeroboam's downfall and destruction. This was the sin (i.e., apostasy) from which many others grew. Though God used political situations and social conditions to bring about His ends, this sin by Jeroboam was the root cause of Israel's fall.

The root spiritual cause of the declension and final fall of the house of Jeroboam is given here. Various political and sociological conditions, and even international relations, might be cited as reasons for the destruction of Jeroboam's line. Nevertheless, the destruction stemmed directly from the king's disobedience to the command of the holy God.

1 Kings 14

Ahijah's Prophecy against Jeroboam

Whereas the prophecy of the man of God in chapter 13 dealt primarily with the destruction of Jeroboam's religious system, Ahijah's prophecy will address Jeroboam's house (dynasty).

- 1] At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam fell sick.

This is a time shortly after the incident recorded in chapter 13. Jeroboam's son, Abijah, should not be confused with Rehoboam's son of the same name (15:1). Jeroboam's son was just a boy at this time (14:3, 12, 17). It is not possible to determine what ailed the lad; but some suggest it was a form of God's discipline.

- 2] And Jeroboam said to his wife, Arise, I pray thee, and disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam; and get thee to Shiloh: behold, there *is* Ahijah the prophet, which told me that *I should be* king over this people.

Shiloh: The former central sanctuary and previous dwelling place of the ark. The town had now become the dwelling place of Ahijah, the prophet, who originally had predicted Jeroboam's rise to power (1 Kgs 11:26-40). Jeroboam's allusion to Ahijah's prediction of his coronation (cf. 11:29-39) suggests that perhaps the king hoped to receive another welcome prophecy, this time that his son would recover. Jeroboam obviously did not realize that Yahweh could or would reveal his wife's identity to the prophet.

- 3] And take with thee ten loaves, and cracknels, and a cruse of honey, and go to him: he shall tell thee what shall become of the child.

The gifts of food sent to Ahijah may have been simply customary, but in light of Jeroboam's other actions they seem designed to win a positive word from the prophet.

- 4] And Jeroboam's wife did so, and arose, and went to Shiloh, and came to the house of Ahijah. But Ahijah could not see; for his eyes were set by reason of his age.

Ahijah the prophet was living at Shiloh, the former site of the tabernacle in Israel.

- 5] And the LORD said unto Ahijah, Behold, the wife of Jeroboam cometh to ask a thing of thee for her son; for he *is* sick: thus and thus shalt thou say unto her: for it shall be, when she cometh in, that she shall feign herself *to be* another *woman*.
- 6] And it was *so*, when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, that he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself *to be* another? for I *am* sent to thee *with* heavy *tidings*.

Disguised, discovered, and doomed. Not only the veil upon her face, but the draperies on her heart were penetrated. Jeroboam's wife hoped to hear a message of deliverance for her boy, but instead she heard a message of doom for her husband, herself, and her son. The prophet quickly unmasked the actress (Why this pretense?).

- 7] Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel,

The king's wife thought she had been sent to Ahijah, but the prophet said he had been sent to her. The LORD is the God of Israel, not the idols Jeroboam had set up. The message he had for her came from Him.

- 8] And rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it thee: and yet thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do *that* only *which* was right in mine eyes;

God reminded the king through the prophet that it was He who had made him a leader over His people. But Jeroboam had not followed in David's footsteps as he should have done.

- 9] But hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back:

God said Jeroboam had done more evil than all who lived before him. The king's idolatry had angered the Lord who regarded it as a rejection of Himself.

- 10] Therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam him that pisseth against the wall, *and* him that is shut up and left in Israel, and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone.

Because Jeroboam had led God's people away from God his house (dynasty) would be cut off: No male would be able to perpetuate his line, which God compared to dung.

- 11] Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat: for the LORD hath spoken *it*.

Jeroboam's family would not be buried but would be eaten by dogs and birds, a terrible disgrace in the minds of Semites. (This would also be true of Baasha's family, 16:4, and Ahab's family, 21:24.)

- 12] Arise thou therefore, get thee to thine own house: *and* when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die.

- 13] And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found *some* good thing toward the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam.

In contradistinction to his father, he would be given honorable burial. The only male descendant of Jeroboam to be buried would be Abijah, who would die very soon.

- 14] Moreover the LORD shall raise him up a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam that day: but what? even now.

His death on the return of the queen to her home would signify the sure fulfillment of the more distant aspects of Ahijah's prophecy. Ahijah said a king would be raised up who would cut off Jeroboam's family. This was Baasha (15:27-29). The last part of 14:14, which is subject to several interpretations, probably means that this would surely come to pass.

- 15] For the LORD shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water, and he shall root up Israel out of this good land, which he gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river, because they have made their groves, provoking the LORD to anger.

Moreover, the whole nation would experience instability and waver like a reed. Jeroboam had planted Israel not in the solid soil of God's Word but in the unsubstantial waters of idolatry, like Egyptian rushes or papyrus reeds. This is a long-range prediction of the captivity yet to come. When Samaria fell in 722 B.C., the northern kingdom experienced this bitter fate at the hands of the Assyrians. And when Jerusalem fell in 586/585 B.C., the southern kingdom underwent deportation at the hands of the Babylonians. The ground given for such chastisement was Israel's incurable idolatry. The Israelites' idolatry was the reason for this judgment. "Groves," Asherah poles (cf. v. 23; 15:13; 16:33) were phallic poles; wooden shafts carved to encourage worship of the Canaanite goddess Asherah.

- 16] And he shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin.

God's "giving Israel up" must be understood in a limited sense. He promised Abraham that his descendants would be blessed forever (Gen 12:2-3; 18:17-18; 22:17-18). Later God brought Israel back from captivity but still has not fulfilled all His promises of blessing which they will yet experience (Isa 62). God did give them up to judgment in captivity, however, which is the forsaking that is in view here.

- 17] And Jeroboam's wife arose, and departed, and came to Tirzah: *and* when she came to the threshold of the door, the child died;

Tirzah: a place of pre-eminent beauty, three hours' travelling east of Samaria, chosen when Israel became a separate kingdom, by the first monarch, and used during three short reigns as a residence of the royal house.

- 18] And they buried him; and all Israel mourned for him, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by the hand of his servant Ahijah the prophet.

These verses record the exact fulfillment of Ahijah's prophecy of the death of Prince Abijah. The queen must have traveled from Shiloh (v. 2) back to

her home in Tirzah with a heavy heart. Jeroboam had moved to Tirzah from Shechem (cf. 12:25). As the Lord's word came to pass immediately in the death of the prince, His long-range prophecies also began to take shape in Jeroboam's reign. One may safely assume that all the territory Solomon ruled except Judah came under Jeroboam's control. Much of this was lost during his reign. This lost area included the land around Damascus to the north which became an independent Aramean state. In the southwest the Philistines repossessed some of their former territory and grew stronger (cf. 15:27). On the east Moab was apparently lost.

Ironically Jeroboam's protector in Egypt (11:40), Shishak (Sheshonk I), invaded Judah (14:25) during Jeroboam's reign. This resulted in heavy damage and widespread destruction. Jeroboam was also defeated by King Abijah of Judah (2 Chr 13:13-20). Israel suffered both in military strength and in territorial holdings during Jeroboam's reign.

Jeroboam's Death

- 19] And the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he warred, and how he reigned, behold, they *are* written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

Starting with Jeroboam the events of the reigns of 18 of the 20 kings of the Northern Kingdom are said in 1 and 2 Kings to have been recorded in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel (all except Tibni, 1 Kgs 16:21-22, and Hoshea, 2 Kgs 17:1-6). Similarly the events of the reigns of 14 of the 19 kings of the Southern Kingdom are said in 1 and 2 Kings to be recorded in "the book of the annals of the kings of Judah" (starting with Rehoboam, 1 Kgs 14:29). These books were historical documents, perhaps kept in the royal archives. They are no longer extant. (Also cf. 1 Chr 27:24, "the book of the annals of King David," and 1 Kgs 11:41, "the book of the annals of Solomon.")

- 20] And the days which Jeroboam reigned *were* two and twenty years: and he slept with his fathers, and Nadab his son reigned in his stead.

For supplementary facts see 2 Chr 13:15-20. However, this reference may be regarded as a convention or formality, since the accounts in 1 Kings concerning Jeroboam are much fuller than those in Chronicles and emphasize the unspiritual aspects of Jeroboam's 22-year rule over Israel. Jeroboam must have been a powerful man to have separated Israel from Judah and ruled it for so long a time. But he lacked the commitment to the Lord that would have made him a great and successful king. Nadab his son succeeded him on the throne.

Rehoboam's Evil Reign in Judah

The historical scene now shifts toward the south as the fortunes of the house of David are delineated. Though his reign was free from the worship of the golden calves, yet spiritual declension and moral delinquency characterized the downward course of the Southern Kingdom.

Rehoboam's Wickedness

- 21] And Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam *was* forty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD did choose out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. And his mother's name *was* Naamah an Ammonitess.

Rehoboam reigned one year as co-regent with his father and sixteen years in his own right: 17 years: 931-913 B.C.) He and all succeeding kings of Judah reigned in Jerusalem. [Perhaps to contrast this city with the capitals of the Northern Kingdom (Shechem, Tirzah, and Samaria, as the city the LORD had chosen, not like the northern capitals that were chosen by men.] The king's mother Naamah was one of Solomon's foreign wives. As an Ammonite she worshiped the detestable idol-god Molech (cf. 11:5, 33). She may have been partially responsible for the revival of Canaanite paganism that took place during Rehoboam's reign.

- 22] And Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done.

Rehoboam turned from the Lord after he had become established on the throne and was strong (2 Chr 12:1, 14). This revival of idolatry reintroduced conditions that had prevailed in the days of the Judges before David turned the nation to the LORD.

- 23] For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree.
24] And there were also sodomites in the land: *and* they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD cast out before the children of Israel.

Sound familiar? The same practices that moved God to purge the land of the moral cancer that plagued it in Joshua's day were those to which the Israelites returned under Rehoboam's leadership.

Shishak's Invasion

- 25] And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, *that* Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem:

Shishak (cf. 11:40), Even though this king had been Solomon's father-in-law, he was no relation of Rehoboam's; but there is a strong probability that he belonged to another dynasty (see on 2Chr 12:2). He was the *Sheshonk I* of Egyptian records (945–924 B.C.), the founder of the Twenty-second Dynasty. He was the instrument in the hand of Providence for punishing the national defection. This was the first serious foreign invasion of Israelite territory since the days of Saul. He had given asylum to Jeroboam earlier (cf. 11:40). In Rehoboam's fifth year Shishak tried to establish Egyptian supremacy over Palestine. His military campaign into Judah, Israel, Edom, and Philistia netted him control of 156 cities.

In the temple of Karnak, the record of his campaigns is inscribed on the exterior of the Amon temple's south wall in a relief picturing. A briefer, more sober account is given in the Bible, wherein it is honestly admitted that Shishak despoiled the beautiful Temple of Solomon before he agreed not to pillage Jerusalem fully.

- 26] And he took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he even took away all: and he took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made.

[This resulted in Rehoboam and the leaders humbling themselves before the Lord and God spared Jerusalem from destruction (2 Chr 12:2-12).] Rehoboam bought Shishak off by giving him many of the treasures of the temple and of the palace (1 Kgs 14:26). These included the 500 gold shields made by Solomon (cf. 10:16-17).

- 27] And king Rehoboam made in their stead brasen shields, and committed *them* unto the hands of the chief of the guard, which kept the door of the king's house.
28] And it was *so*, when the king went into the house of the LORD, that the guard bare them, and brought them back into the guard chamber.

Shishak's invasion was the first serious attack against Judah by any foreign power since Saul's days. However, the Egyptian king was not able to subdue Palestine as he had hoped.

Rehoboam's Death

- 29] Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?
30] And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all *their* days.

The continual warfare mentioned here is mentioned briefly again (15:6; cf. 2Chr 12:15) but is not explained. In view of Rehoboam's initial plan to regain Israel by force (1 Kgs 12:21; which he abandoned after the Prophet Shemaiah

reported God's prohibition of civil war, 2 Chr 11:1-4), these constant wars probably involved border disputes in the territory of Benjamin. It appears that Rehoboam was more successful in these border disputes since he won both the hearts and the land of the Benjamites. The exact border probably changed many times in these early years of the divided monarchy. The 15 cities Rehoboam fortified were located in Judah and Benjamin, south and west of Jerusalem. Probably after Shishak's invasion they were strengthened to defend Judah against future attacks from Egypt and Philistia.

- 31] And Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. And his mother's name *was* Naamah an Ammonitess. And Abijam his son reigned in his stead.

Addenda: The Prophets

Reading the divine history, we quickly gain the impression that two groups of people are most significant during the time of the Divided Kingdom. One group is made up of rulers, whose deeds and misdeeds are chronicled. The other group is made up of prophets, whose voices were raised at critical times in each nation's experience. Scripture gives us insights into how the prophets received their messages. At times they seem to have heard an external voice (cf. 1 Sam 3:3–9). Often the voice was internal (Isa 7:3–4; Hab 2:2). Then again, the prophets were enabled to see spiritual realities invisible to others (Num 22:31; 2 Kgs 6:15–17). At other times the prophets saw visions (Ezek 37; 40–48).

Often, during the days of the two kingdoms, the ministry of the prophets was directed to the rulers. This was true in earlier days as well. Nathan the prophet rebuked David (2 Sam 12), as did Gad (2 Sam 24). It was Samuel, the prophet-judge, who ministered to Saul and anointed David king. Because the kings chose to move away from God, meetings between prophets and rulers often became confrontations.

On the day that Jeroboam instituted his false religion, he was confronted by "a man of God from Judah" (1 Kgs 13:1). This prophet announced judgment on the altar Jeroboam was consecrating, foretelling the birth of Josiah, a king of Judah, who would one day burn the bones of the false priests on it. He gave a sign to prove that he was speaking by God's command: the altar would crack, and the ashes spill out. Angered, Jeroboam commanded that the young prophet be seized. But the hand he stretched out was gripped by paralysis: he could not lower it! And at that moment, the altar split. Cowed, Jeroboam begged the prophet to ask God to release his paralysis, and the hand was restored. God's spokesman then made his announcements with unquestioned divine authority!

Such miracles or soon-fulfilled prophecies often authenticated the prophets. The influence they wielded is shown by the fact that Rehoboam turned back an army about to attack the rebels in Israel at the word of Shemaiah (2 Chr 11). Even Jeroboam, when his son became ill, sent his wife to the Prophet Ahijah to inquire of the Lord (1 Kgs 14). The ministry of the prophets was often resented by rebellious kings, and their messages were often rejected. But kings—godly and ungodly—and the common people as well, recognized these men as God’s spokesmen and viewed them with awe and often fear. How is it then that the prophets were unable to halt the slide of the two kingdoms into sin? Why was their ministry largely ineffective?

As today, the problem lay not with the Word but with the hearers. These spokesmen for God did deliver His message. But the people did not respond with faith. They recognized that the message and the messenger were from God, but this awareness did not lead them to *commitment*. Unwilling to submit to God’s way, the people stubbornly held to their own paths. It is not, as Jesus reminds us, the one who hears the Word of God who is blessed. It is the person who *hears and does* who receives God’s blessing (Mt 7:24).

The men and women of the two kingdoms who took pride in their religious activities, their prophets, their temple, and holy places, were all too like men and women of today who confuse churchgoing with discipleship, and “Bible-believing” with obedience. In the prophetic call to God’s people to respond to Him and wholeheartedly obey, we hear His invitation to us today—an invitation designed not to burden us, but to lead us safely away from the edge of personal judgment, toward which our willful choices would most certainly lead.

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) Trace evidences of a schism between Judah and the northern tribes long before Rehoboam.
- 2) What were the factors that favored Judah in the south?
- 3) What were the factors that favored Ephraim in the north?
- 4) List from the actions which Jeroboam took to establish his kingdom. What impact did each have on the future of his people?
- 5) Why did Jeroboam chose Shechem as his initial capital?
- 6) List at least a dozen (20?) observations on prophecy from examining the ministry of the “man of God from Judah” (1 Kgs 13).

- 7) What significance did Rehoboam’s mother have on his subsequent reign?

Discussion Questions

(“Where two people agree, one is redundant.”)

- 1) Was Rehoboam’s taxation policy or Ahijah’s prophecy the most dominant factor in the rise of Jeroboam?
- 2) Develop from the text a personality profile of Jeroboam. How is he like or unlike modern politicians?
- 3) Discuss the strange episode of the two “men of God” in Chapter 13, and the paradoxical lessons involved: what should the young prophet have done, and why? Was God a bit too severe in His judgment?
- 4) What do the two prophecies of Ahijah concerning Jeroboam teach us about predestination?
- 5) What were the main *spiritual* lessons in these chapters?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Make a comparative time line of the kings in the northern and southern kingdoms, from Solomon until their respective captivities.
- 2) Compile the reasons (and references) that the myths of the “Ten Lost Tribes” are non-Biblical.
- 3) Trace the role of “groves” (*Ashteroth*) and “high places” in the Scriptures.
- 4) Contrast the borders of the northern kingdom between Solomon’s time and the end of Jeroboam’s reign.

Preparation for Next Session:

Read chapters 15 & 16; and explore the parallel passages in 2 Chronicles 11 -28.

Session 6 1 Kings 15 - 16

Israel was born in rebellion and nursed in apostasy. Yet there was worse to come.

1 Kings 15

Abijah's Evil Reign in Judah

- 1] Now in the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam the son of Nebat reigned Abijam over Judah.
- 2] Three years reigned he in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom.

Abijah's three-year reign in Judah (913-911 B.C.) was within Jeroboam's reign in Israel (931-910 B.C.). Abijah was a son of Rehoboam and Maachah, a daughter of Absalom (Abishalom is a variant spelling), (2 Chr 11:21), of Uriel (2 Chr 13:2). Hence, it has been thought probable that Tamar, the daughter of Absalom (2 Sam 14:27; 18:18), had been married to Uriel, and that Maachah was their daughter.

- 3] And he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father.

All the sins of Rehoboam refer to the same kinds of idolatrous offenses (cf. 14:23-24). The importance of one's affections is emphasized by the reference to Abijah's heart; one's affections often determine his actions. For a fuller account of the reign of Abijam (or Abijah), see 2 Chr 13:1-22. Abijam fashioned his life after Rehoboam's ungodly and wicked example.

- 4] Nevertheless for David's sake did the LORD his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem:

God's patience with Abijah was because of His promises to David more than to Abijah's own character. ("Him," v. 4, refers to David, not Abijah.) A lamp is a picturesque way of describing a successor or successors who would dispel all kinds of darkness; the figure refers to the whole of David's dynasty (Cf. 2 Sam 21:17; 2 Kgs 8:19).

- 5] Because David did *that which was* right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any *thing* that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.
- 6] And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life.

This war between continued throughout Abijah's lifetime.

Abijah's Death

- 7] Now the rest of the acts of Abijam, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And there was war between Abijam and Jeroboam.

A somewhat more pious portrait of Abijam is given in 2 Chr 13:1-22. Particularly, in the oration Abijam made against Jeroboam, he seems to evidence some faith in Jehovah. Perhaps Abijam, like many others, could preach better than he could practice. The second reference to war with Jeroboam (cf. 15:6) suggests that the antagonism between Israel and Judah at this time was intense.

- 8] And Abijam slept with his fathers; and they buried him in the city of David: and Asa his son reigned in his stead.

Asa's Good Reign in Judah

Eight of the 19 kings of Judah were evaluated by God as good even though some of their recorded deeds were evil. Four of these good kings led Judah in religious reforms designed to restore the nation to a purer form of worship and to return the people to obeying the Mosaic Law. Asa was the first good king of Judah (v. 11) and the first reformer.

- 9] And in the twentieth year of Jeroboam king of Israel reigned Asa over Judah.
- 10] And forty and one years reigned he in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom.

Asa reigned 41 years (911-870 B.C.). Maachah was his grandmother (not "mother" as in some versions; cf. v. 2).

- 11] And Asa did *that which was* right in the eyes of the LORD, as *did* David his father.

The divine assessment of Asa's rule was that he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, generally speaking. David, of course, was Asa's ancestor, not his immediate father. The writer of 2 Chronicles gave much more information about Asa's reign than is found in 1 Kings. Asa's reign began with 10 years of peace (2 Chr 14:1). It was probably during this period that he instituted his first series of religious reforms (2 Chr 14:2-5). At that time he also fortified Judah's defenses (2 Chr 14:6-8). The peace was broken by an invasion by Zerah the Ethiopian, a commander of the Egyptian King Osarkon I. But Asa defeated the Egyptians, though Judah was greatly outnumbered, by relying on the Lord (2 Chr 14:9-15).

The Prophet Azariah warned Asa to continue to trust in God and not to think that his own power had saved him (2 Chr 15:1-7). More years of peace followed (2 Chr 15:19). Encouraged by God's prophet, Asa embarked on a second period of reformation (1 Kgs 15:12-15; 2 Chr 15:8-18).

- 12] And he took away the sodomites out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made.

- 13] And also Maachah his mother, even her he removed from *being* queen, because she had made an idol in a grove; and Asa destroyed her idol, and burnt *it* by the brook Kidron.

The expulsion of the sodomites and the destruction of idols introduced by Rehoboam and Abijah were part of this reform, as was Asa's deposing of his grandmother Maacah from the official position of queen mother because of her repulsive Asherah pole, which he burned in the Kidron Valley.

- 14] But the high places were not removed: nevertheless Asa's heart was perfect with the LORD all his days.

Asa removed some of the high places (2 Chr 14:3) but not all of them (1 Kgs 15:14). Nevertheless his heart was fully committed to the LORD all his life. In view of Asa's self-reliance later in his life this statement probably means that he did not tolerate idolatry but worshiped only the true God.

- 15] And he brought in the things which his father had dedicated, and the things which himself had dedicated, into the house of the LORD, silver, and gold, and vessels.

The silver, gold, and articles that he and his father had dedicated probably refer to the booty that Abijah had taken in his war with Jeroboam (2 Chr 13:16-17) and what Asa had acquired in defeating the Egyptians (2 Chr 6 14:12-13). Second Chronicles adds other details of Asa's reform including an account of the formal renewal of the Mosaic Covenant (2 Chr 15:9-17).

Asa's Victory over Baasha

- 16] And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days.

Asa enjoyed a ten years' peace after Jeroboam's defeat by Abijam, and this interval was wisely and energetically spent in making internal reforms, as well as increasing the means of national defense (2Chr 14:1-7).

- 17] And Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah, and built Ramah, that he might not suffer any to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah.

In the 15th year of his reign, however, Baasha king of Israel (909-886 B.C.) commenced hostilities against him, and, invading his kingdom, erected a strong fortress at Ramah, which was near Gibeah, and only four miles north of Jerusalem.

- 18] Then Asa took all the silver and the gold *that were* left in the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and delivered them into the hand of his servants: and king Asa sent them to Benhadad, the son of

- Tabrimon, the son of Hezion, king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus, saying, 19] *There is* a league between me and thee, *and* between my father and thy father: behold, I have sent unto thee a present of silver and gold; come and break thy league with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me.

Asa's plan to divert Baasha from strengthening Ramah included emptying his treasuries to buy a treaty with Ben-Hadad I, the king of Aram in Damascus.

- 20] So Benhadad hearkened unto king Asa, and sent the captains of the hosts which he had against the cities of Israel, and smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abelbethmaachah, and all Cinneroth, with all the land of Naphtali.

Ben-Hadad invaded Israel and took some towns near the Sea of Kinnereth (later known as the Sea of Galilee), forcing Baasha to move his forces from Ramah to the north.

- 21] And it came to pass, when Baasha heard *thereof*, that he left off building of Ramah, and dwelt in Tirzah. 22] Then king Asa made a proclamation throughout all Judah; none *was* exempted: and they took away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baasha had builded; and king Asa built with them Geba of Benjamin, and Mizpah.

Asa then proceeded to confiscate the building materials (stones and timber) Baasha left behind to fortify Ramah and used them to strengthen his own defense cities of Geba and Mizpah near Israel's border. His plan was clever and successful, but it also may demonstrate a lack of trust in God. For getting help from Aram's king, the Prophet Hanani rebuked Asa (2 Chr 16:7-9). Asa resented the rebuke and put Hanani in prison (2 Chr 16:10). Perhaps Asa's successes against Egypt and Israel made him think too highly of himself.

Asa's Death

- 23] The rest of all the acts of Asa, and all his might, and all that he did, and the cities which he built, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? Nevertheless in the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet.

Asa's achievements were recorded in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah (cf. 14:29; 15:7). At the end of his life Asa again failed to seek the Lord. When his feet became diseased he did not ask for the Lord's help but relied only on the physicians (2 Chr 16:12). Though Asa's faith was not what it might have been, all in all his relationship with God was characterized by fidelity and blessing during his long reign.

- 24] And Asa slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father: and Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead.

Perhaps because of Asa's poor health his godly son Jehoshaphat reigned as coregent with him during the last 3 years of his life (873-870 B.C.). When Asa died, Ahab (874-853 B.C.) was reigning in Israel.

Nadab's Evil Reign in Israel

The scene now reverts to the Northern Kingdom and shifts back in time to the early years of Asa's reign over Judah.

- 25] And Nadab the son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned over Israel two years.

Nadab was the brother of Abijah who had died in childhood (14:17). Whether Nadab was older or younger than Abijah is not known. He was the second ruler of the Jeroboam dynasty, and reigned for under two years (910-909 B.C.). It must be remembered that while some eight dynasties were succeeding each other in northern Israel, to the south of Judah but one dynasty, the Davidic house, held sway.

- 26] And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin.

Nadab continued the policies begun by his father which the LORD regarded as evil. The seriousness of Jeroboam's sins can be seen in that he had caused Israel to commit sin as well as sinning himself.

- 27] And Baasha the son of Ahijah, of the house of Issachar, conspired against him; and Baasha smote him at Gibbethon, which *belonged* to the Philistines; for Nadab and all Israel laid siege to Gibbethon.
28] Even in the third year of Asa king of Judah did Baasha slay him, and reigned in his stead.

Baasha killed Nadab at Gibbethon, a strong Philistine town southwest of Israel, between Ekron and Gezer. Evidently Israel did not capture this town (cf. 16:15-17). Perhaps the siege ended when Nadab was killed. His assassin Baasha then became king of Israel (15:33-16:7).

The End of Israel's First Dynasty

- 29] And it came to pass, when he reigned, *that* he smote all the house of Jeroboam; he left not to Jeroboam any that breathed, until he had destroyed him, according unto the saying of the LORD, which he spake by his servant Ahijah the Shilonite:

Baasha's destruction of the house of Jeroboam was intended to secure his own throne. It fulfilled Ahijah's prophecy of the destruction of Jeroboam's dynasty (14:14).

- 30] Because of the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned, and which he made Israel sin, by his provocation wherewith he provoked the LORD God of Israel to anger.

The reason for this severe judgment is reiterated by the writer here: specifically the worship at the golden-calf shrines is in view. This worship was continued by all of Jeroboam's successors and was frequently condemned in 1 and 2 Kings (cf. 1 Kgs 15:34; 16:19, 26, 31; 22:52; etc.).

- 31] Now the rest of the acts of Nadab, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?
32] And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days.

Baasha's Evil Reign in Israel

- 33] In the third year of Asa king of Judah began Baasha the son of Ahijah to reign over all Israel in Tirzah, twenty and four years.

Baasha took the throne of Israel in the third year of Asa and reigned in Tirzah the capital (cf. 14:17; 15:21) for 24 years (909-886 B.C.). His was the third-longest reign of the Israelite kings.

- 34] And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin.

However, the brevity of his history as recorded here suggests that his reign was comparatively insignificant. He continued the religious policies begun by Jeroboam.

1 Kings 16 Jehu's Prophecy

- 1] Then the word of the LORD came to Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha, saying,

Jehu the prophet must be distinguished from Jehu the king of Israel (841-814 B.C.). This prophet was the son of Hanani, also a prophet. This Hanani may have been the prophet who warned King Asa of Judah (2 Chr 16:7-9).

- 2] Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel; and thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam, and hast made my people Israel to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins;

God said He had lifted Baasha up from the dust and made him leader of the Israelites. This implies that Baasha had a lowly origin.

- 3] Behold, I will take away the posterity of Baasha, and the posterity of his house; and will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

- 4] Him that dieth of Baasha in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth of his in the fields shall the fowls of the air eat.

Almost the same words used to describe Baasha's future judgment had been given to Jeroboam by the Prophet Ahijah (cf. 14:7, 10-11) and were given later by Elijah to Ahab (21:24). The fact that Baasha did not turn to the Lord in spite of his being God's instrument of judgment on the house of Jeroboam suggests his complete blindness to the importance of spiritual matters in his own life and in that of his nation. Baasha committed the same sins himself. This indicates that the level of his apostasy was deep.

Baasha's Death

- 5] Now the rest of the acts of Baasha, and what he did, and his might, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?
- 6] So Baasha slept with his fathers, and was buried in Tirzah: and Elah his son reigned in his stead.
- 7] And also by the hand of the prophet Jehu the son of Hanani came the word of the LORD against Baasha, and against his house, even for all the evil that he did in the sight of the LORD, in provoking him to anger with the work of his hands, in being like the house of Jeroboam; and because he killed him.

On the basis of verse 7 it appears that the prophetic ministry of Jehu continued throughout Elah's reign. *Blessed is the king whose prophet is his counselor, but cursed is he who heeds not his prophet.* The writer followed his regular recording of the facts surrounding the king's death with an additional reemphasis on the reasons for Baasha's judgment by God. Baasha's destruction of Jeroboam's house (family or dynasty) was one reason. Even though God determined that Jeroboam's dynasty would be destroyed and announced this beforehand through Ahijah, God held Baasha responsible for killing Jeroboam's descendants. In doing so Baasha had not acted under God's direction, but only to gain his own ends.

Elah's Evil Reign in Israel

- 8] In the twenty and sixth year of Asa king of Judah began Elah the son of Baasha to reign over Israel in Tirzah, two years.

Elah assumed the throne of Israel and reigned in Tirzah, the capital; his reign (886–885 B.C.), a brief and unhappy one, lasted just one year, continued the wicked policies of his predecessors (v. 13) and ended in a violent death.

- 9] And his servant Zimri, captain of half *his* chariots, conspired against him, as he was in Tirzah, drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza steward of *his* house in Tirzah.
- 10] And Zimri went in and smote him, and killed him, in the twenty and seventh year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his stead.

As commander of half of Elah's chariots Zimri was a powerful military officer. No specific accomplishments are recorded for him. He is infamous as the king who was murdered while getting drunk. Elah and Belshazzar had at least this in common. Thus the third dynasty came to the throne of Israel—if, indeed a line that ruled for only seven days can be dignified with the name of dynasty.

- 11] And it came to pass, when he began to reign, as soon as he sat on his throne, *that* he slew all the house of Baasha: he left him not one that pisseth against a wall, neither of his kinsfolks, nor of his friends.
- 12] Thus did Zimri destroy all the house of Baasha, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake against Baasha by Jehu the prophet,
- 13] For all the sins of Baasha, and the sins of Elah his son, by which they sinned, and by which they made Israel to sin, in provoking the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities.
- 14] Now the rest of the acts of Elah, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

Zimri completely destroyed Israel's second ruling family plus friends of the family in order to avoid retaliation against his coup d'état. Thus Jehu's prophecy (cf. v. 3) was fulfilled. Again the writer identified the spiritual root of the judgment (v. 13).

Zimri's Evil Reign in Israel

- 15] In the twenty and seventh year of Asa king of Judah did Zimri reign seven days in Tirzah. And the people *were* encamped against Gibbethon, which *belonged* to the Philistines.

Zimri's seven-day reign (885 B.C.) proved to be the shortest of any Israelite king. Gibbethon in Philistia was again under siege by Israel's army (cf. 15:27).

- 16] And the people *that were* encamped heard say, Zimri hath conspired, and hath also slain the king: wherefore all Israel made Omri, the captain of the host, king over Israel that day in the camp.

It probably took a runner two days to reach the army at Gibbethon after the assassination of Elah. The troops immediately heralded Omri as the new king even though Zimri had declared himself king in Tirzah.

- 17] And Omri went up from Gibbethon, and all Israel with him, and they besieged Tirzah.

Zimri was not an acceptable candidate for the throne in the minds of Omri and his men as they marched back to the capital. They appeared at the city walls (probably after marching about four or five days) and took control of the city.

- 18] And it came to pass, when Zimri saw that the city was taken, that he went into the palace of the king's house, and burnt the king's house over him with fire, and died,
- Zimri apparently knew he could not retain his throne or save his life, so he did as much damage to the palace as he could while taking his life.
- 19] For his sins which he sinned in doing evil in the sight of the LORD, in walking in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin which he did, to make Israel to sin.
- 20] Now the rest of the acts of Zimri, and his treason that he wrought, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

Omri's Evil Reign in Israel

- 21] Then were the people of Israel divided into two parts: half of the people followed Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king; and half followed Omri.

The death of Zimri (vv. 17-18) did not automatically place the kingdom in Omri's hands. Half the population including the army sided with him, but the other half preferred Tibni. During this time civil war ravaged Israel and threatened to split the Northern Kingdom into two parts. Tibni's strength can be seen in that he was able to oppose Omri successfully for six years (885-880 B.C.).

- 22] But the people that followed Omri prevailed against the people that followed Tibni the son of Ginath: so Tibni died, and Omri reigned.

But eventually Omri overpowered Tibni and became the sole ruler (880-874 B.C.). Omri's army support apparently proved decisive and Tibni died, probably by being executed. According to Josephus (*Antiq.* VIII. 12. 1) Tibni was slain by his opponents. The series of assassinations in 886 B.C. led to the crowning of Omri, a ranking army officer. Capable and aggressive, Omri quickly stabilized the nation. He built and fortified Samaria as capital and so impressed the Assyrians that a hundred years later Israel was known by them as the "land of Omri." The Bible tells us little about Omri's reign (1 Kgs 16:23-27), but archeology has added several important bits of information:

The Moabite Stone

The Moabite Stone is a black basalt memorial stone discovered in Moab by a German missionary in 1868. Nearly four feet high, it contained about 34 lines in an alphabet similar to Hebrew. The stone was probably erected about 850 B.C. by the Moabite King Mesha. King Mesha's story written on the stone celebrated his overthrow of the nation of Israel. This event apparently is recorded in 2 Kings 3:4-27, although the Biblical account makes it clear that Israel was victorious in the battle. The passage shows

that Mesha honors his god Chemosh in terms similar to the Old Testament reverence for the Lord. The inhabitants of entire cities were apparently slaughtered to appease this deity, recalling the similar practices of the Israelites, especially as described in the Book of Joshua. Besides telling of his violent conquests, Mesha boasted on the stone of the building of cities (with Israelite forced labor) and the construction of cisterns, walls, gates, towers, a king's palace, and even a highway. The Moabite stone has profound Biblical relevance. Historically, it confirms Old Testament accounts. It has a theological parallel to Israel's worship of one god. It is also valuable geographically because it mentions no less than 15 sites listed in the Old Testament. The writing on the stone also resembles Hebrew, the language in which most of the Old Testament was originally written. Some pieces of the stone are now housed in the Louvre Museum in Paris. The marriage of his son Ahab to the Phoenician princess Jezebel indicates close relations with Phoenicia, a valuable trading ally for Israel. It is likely that much of the wealth of Samaria revealed by archaeological expeditions has roots in the diplomacy and statecraft of Omri. Yet in Scripture the focus clearly is not on the political and economic affairs of God's people. The focus instead is placed on the religious and moral dimensions of life.

- 23] In the thirty and first year of Asa king of Judah began Omri to reign over Israel, twelve years: six years reigned he in Tirzah.

The twelve years of his reign are computed from the beginning of his reign, which was in the twenty-seventh year of Asa's reign. He held a contested reign for four years with Tibni; and then, at the date stated in this verse, entered on a sole and peaceful reign of eight years. For the first six years of his reign (885-880 B.C.) Omri ruled in the old capital of Tirzah (cf. 14:17; 15:21, 33; 16:6, 8-9, 15, 17). But then he moved into his brand new capital, Samaria.

- 24] And he bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill, Samaria.

No doubt the desolation wrought by Zimri's fire was one of the factors that made a new capital highly desirable, if not absolutely necessary. He built this city on a hill, well situated for defense, seven miles west of Tirzah. The palace of Tirzah being in ruins, Omri, in selecting the site of his royal residence, was naturally influenced by considerations both of pleasure and advantage. In the center of a wide amphitheatre of mountains, about seven miles from Shechem, rises an oblong hill with steep, yet accessible sides, and a long flat top extending east and west, and rising five hundred or six hundred feet above the valley. Omri paid Shemer two talents (ca. 150 pounds) of silver for the hill. (Samaria was

named after Shemer; cf. v. 24). Omri was probably the strongest leader of the Northern Kingdom up to that time. Assyrian records dating from over a century later refer to Israel as “the land of Omri.” During Omri’s reign Ben-Hadad I, king of the Arameans in Damascus, continued to add to his holdings to the north of Israel. Omri’s son, Ahab, had difficulty containing these Aramean aggressors. Also the Assyrian Empire was growing stronger and farther to the northeast under Ashurnasirpal II (883-859); and proceeded to expand its territory as far west as the Mediterranean Sea. Faced by these threats on his north, Omri was able to protect Israel well enough to attack and defeat Moab to the southeast at the same time. This victory is referred to on the famous Moabite Stone. Another of Omri’s significant achievements was his alliance with the Phoenicians which was sealed with the marriage of his son Ahab to Jezebel, a daughter of the Phoenician king, Ethbaal (cf. v.31).

- 25] But Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all that *were* before him.
 26] For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin, to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities.

Though Omri is passed over quickly in 1 Kings, he was a powerful and politically effective king. But the major concern of the writer of 1 Kings was Omri’s spiritual condition.

- 27] Now the rest of the acts of Omri which he did, and his might that he shewed, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?
 28] So Omri slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria: and Ahab his son reigned in his stead.

In this he was the worst Israelite king so far (vv. 25-26). Omri’s 12-year reign ended with his death and burial in his new capital city. Omri was the founder of the fourth dynasty of Israelite kings. His rule passed to his son, Ahab. And here Omri’s key significance seems to have been that he fathered Ahab who was, without question, the most evil ruler to that point.

Ahab’s Evil Reign in Israel

Ahab ruled Israel from Samaria for 22 years (874-853 B.C.). He was the most wicked king Israel had experienced, even worse than his father Omri who was worse than all before him (v. 25). As a political and military leader, Ahab receives good marks. He was effective in defeating Israel’s Syrian enemies. He joined in a coalition army which halted the invasion of a great Assyrian force under Shalmaneser III. And Ahab maintained the borders of his land. Assyrian records tell us that Ahab was able to

contribute 2,000 chariots (the tanks of ancient warfare) to the coalition army, as well as some 10,000 foot soldiers.

Economically, Israel also prospered. The Phoenician alliance meant that sea trade routes were open to landlocked Israel, and the great “ivory house” Ahab built for himself (1 Kgs 22:39) testifies to the land’s prosperity. Yet that same Phoenician alliance opened the door to introduction of Baal worship in Israel. Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel, a devotee of Baal, forced a direct confrontation. Jezebel was not satisfied with coexistence: she insisted that Baal worship replace any worship of Jehovah. She not only slaughtered the Hebrew prophets of Jehovah (18:4); she also imported hundreds of prophets of Baal to establish worship centers for this pagan deity. Jezebel and Ahab went about imposing this entire system on Israel, aggressively seeking to blot out the worship of Jehovah.

- 29] And in the thirty and eighth year of Asa king of Judah began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel: and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty and two years.
 30] And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that *were* before him.
 31] And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him.

In addition, Ahab married a pagan princess, Jezebel, who zealously tried to promote her depraved cult as the exclusive religion of Israel. Jezebel’s father, Ethbaal, was king of the Sidonians (Phoenicians), with his capital in Tyre. He was priest of Ashtaroath or Astarte, who, having murdered Philetes, king of Tyre, ascended the throne of that kingdom, being the eighth king since Hiram. [Baal (meaning “lord”) is a name used generally in the Old Testament for the male deity the native Canaanite tribes worshiped under various other titles. The Tyrians called him Baal Melqart, but their religion was only a cultic variation of the standard Baal worship common throughout the region.]

Jezebel was the wicked daughter of this regicide and idol priest—and, on her marriage with Ahab, never rested till she had got all the forms of her native Tyrian worship introduced into her adopted country. Evidently Ahab was not forced to marry Jezebel; his choice to marry her is something for which the text held him responsible.

- 32] And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria.
 33] And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.

“Grove”: Asherah poles (cf. 14:15,23; 15:13) were phallic symbols carved to stimulate worship of Baal’s female counterpart. The text repeats the seriousness of Ahab’s sins for emphasis (cf. v. 30).

- 34] In his days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun.

The refortification of Jericho was specifically forbidden by Joshua after God supernaturally destroyed it (Josh 6:26). Though the city had been occupied since Joshua’s day, Hiel’s reconstruction seems to have been the first serious attempt to restore it to its former condition. Joshua’s prophecy was fulfilled literally when two of Hiel’s sons perished. [Perhaps this reference, which seems unrelated to Ahab’s accomplishments, was included to show that as God’s word was fulfilled in this instance so it would be in Ahab’s case. Ahab was setting up a system of worship that God said He would judge, as Hiel had tried to set up a city that God had said He would judge.] The reign of evil King Ahab and his Queen Jezebel will be continued in the next two sessions.

Summary: The Southern Kingdom (931–586 B.C.)

The dreary portrait of Israel’s experience under the apostate kings is lightened when we look at Judah. Politically, the Southern Kingdom knew its ups and downs as conflicts with Egypt, Israel, and other surrounding states brought alternate victories and defeats. Spiritually, Judah was blessed with several godly kings. But she also knew the rule of apostate kings who followed Solomon’s example and permitted pagan worship in the holy land. Queen Athaliah (841–835 B.C.) struggled to introduce the cult of Baal in Judah *as her mother Jezebel had in Israel*.

Yet a succession of Godapproved kings (Joash through Jotham) kept the extension of evil tendencies to a minimum. Still, the great revivals under Kings Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Joash were unable to purify the land. Much local autonomy was retained, and the piety of the king did not guarantee the holiness of his people.

Hezekiah, one of the most godly kings, guided Judah during the critical time of Israel’s destruction. He instituted drastic reforms to correct the idolatry of his father Ahaz, and thoroughly cleansed the land. He was certainly influenced by two great prophetic contemporaries, Isaiah and Micah. Yet Hezekiah’s own son, Manasseh, who ruled 55 years, was one of Judah’s most evil men. He supported pagan worship, recognized the sacrifice of children to the Ammonite god Molech, and killed all who protested.

Tradition tells us that Isaiah met his death at Manasseh’s hands. Despite a later revival under Josiah (640–609 B.C.), king during Habakkuk’s day, the religious and moral deterioration was such that the revival made little impact on Judah. The graphic description by Jeremiah and Ezekiel (especially Ezek 8–11) of the way of life of God’s people helps us see clearly why the announced judgment *had to come*.

And come it did. In a series of deportations, the surviving kingdom was wrenched from the land. The temple and the Holy City were razed. Under the weight of this agonizing chastisement, God’s people finally did come to repent in a foreign land. There they were purified of idolatry and, finally, a remnant returned from Babylon to the Promised Land to reestablish the Jewish homeland and to await the Messiah.

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) List the kings of Judah from Rehoboam until the Babylonian captivity, with their tenures. Which 8 of the 20 kings of Judah were rated as “good”? Which 4 of these “good” kings led the nation in religious reform?
- 2) List the kings of the northern kingdom. Were there any “good” ones?
- 3) List the prophets prominent with each of the kings above.
- 4) Contrast the three capitals of the northern kingdom.
- 5) List the kings who were assassinated in both the northern and southern kingdoms.
- 6) Why were Hiel’s sons killed? How was this a fulfillment of prophecy?

Discussion Questions

(“Where two people agree, one is redundant.”)

- 1) Contrast the secular view of the kings of the northern kingdom with their spiritual assessment.
- 2) What were the main spiritual lessons revealed in these chapters?
- 3) Contrast the role of the prophets in the court of the kings, with the leadership of today.

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Profile the external geopolitical horizon during the days of the divided kingdom: 931–606 BC.

Preparation for Next Session:

Read 1 Kings 17, 18, & 19 for the career of wicked king Ahab, and the remarkable career of Elijah.

Session 6B

Summation: The Cost of Idolatry

A summation of the predicament of the Northern Kingdom includes two fundamental issues: 1) Their Political Separation and 2) The Cost of Idolatry

1) Their Political Separation

The Myth of the “Ten Lost Tribes”

There are many groups that believe the northern tribes, separated during the rift between Rehoboam and Jeroboam after the death of Solomon (and subsequently taken captive by Assyria in 722 B.C.), later migrated to Europe and elsewhere. The myth of the “Ten Lost Tribes” is the basis for “British-Israelism” and other colorful legends, but these stories have no real Biblical basis. They are based upon misconceptions derived from the misreading of various Bible passages (e.g., 2 Kgs 17:7-23, 2 Chr 6:6-11, etc.)

The Faithful Voted With Their Feet

Before the Assyrian captivity, substantial numbers from the northern tribes had identified themselves with the house of David (1 Kgs 12:16-20; 2 Chr 11:16-17). The rebellion of Jeroboam and subsequent crises caused many to repudiate the Northern Kingdom and unite with the Southern Kingdom in a common alliance to the house of David and a desire to worship the Lord in Jerusalem (2 Chr 19:4; 30:1, 10-11, 25-26; 34:5-7, 22; 35:17-18).

In 930 B.C., Jeroboam ruled the Northern Kingdom from his capital in Samaria (1 Kgs 11:43-12:33). When Jeroboam turned the Northern Kingdom to idolatry, the Levites (and others who desired to remain

faithful) migrated south to Rehoboam (2 Chr 11:14-17). Horrified that Jeroboam had set up a rival religion with golden calf worship at Bethel and Dan, many Northerners moved south, knowing that the only place acceptable to God was the Temple on Mt. Moriah (Deut 12:5-7; 16:2-6; Isa 18:7). Those who favored idolatry migrated north to Jeroboam where idolatry was “politically correct.” Later, when Asa reigned as king in the south, another great company came from the north (2 Chr 15:9). Years after the deportation by Assyria, King Hezekiah of Judah issued a call to all Israel to come and worship in Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover (2 Chr 30:5-6, 10-11, 21).

Eighty years later King Josiah of Judah also issued a call, and an offering for the Temple was received from “Manasseh and Ephraim and all the remnant of Israel...” (2 Chr 34:9). Eventually, all 12 tribes were represented in the south. God even addresses the 12 tribes in the south: “Speak unto Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin...” (2 Chr 11:3). The “tribe of Judah” (2 Kgs 17:18, et al.) is used idiomatically for the Southern Kingdom. (Cf. 1 Kgs 11:13, 32.)

When encountering the tribal designations, it is important to distinguish between the *territories* allocated to the tribes and the *people* themselves.

The Northern Kingdom Falls

In 724 B.C. Shalmaneser V besieged Samaria for three years. King Hoshea of Israel attempted to revolt against paying Assyrians annual tribute money—a treaty with Pharaoh of Egypt did not help (2 Kgs 18:2)—and Samaria, Jeroboam’s capital, fell in 722 B.C. with Sargon II seizing power in 721 B.C. The Assyrians implemented their infamous policy of mixing conquered peoples to keep them from organizing a revolt. Israelite captives were mixed with Persians and others, and strangers from far-off lands were resettled in Samaria. The resulting mixed, quasi-Jewish populations became the Samaritans.” (f. Jn 4:20-22). (You can read about this “fall” in 2 Kgs 17.)

Not all from the Northern Kingdom were deported. Archaeologists have uncovered annals of the Assyrian Sargon, in which he tells that he carried away only 27,290 people and 50 chariots. (*Biblical Archaeology*, VI, 1943, page 58.) Population estimates of the Northern Kingdom at that time range from 400,000 to 500,000; less than 1/20th were deported—mostly the leadership from the capital, Samaria. The rest of the Northern Kingdom were taken by Assyria as slaves, which were a valuable commodity. (It is difficult to view the Assyrians as careless enough to let their captives wander off to Europe!)

When the Babylonians take over Assyria, the descendants of the “ten tribes” were probably again commingled with the captives of Judah.

The Babylonians Take Over

When the Northern Kingdom went into captivity (722 B.C.), all 12 tribes were also represented in the south. When the Babylonians took the Southern Kingdom into captivity (586 B.C.), members of all 12 tribes of Israel were involved. Isaiah, prophesying to Judah, refers to them as the “House of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel...” (Isa 48:1; cf. vv. 12-14).

Post-Captivity Terminology

After the Babylonian captivity, the terms “Jew” and “Israelite” are used interchangeably. Ezra calls the returning remnant “Jews” 8 times and “Israel” 40 times. (Ezra also speaks of “all Israel”: Ezra 2:70; 3:11; 8:35; 10:25, et al.) Nehemiah uses the term “Jew” 11 times and “Israel” 22 times. Nehemiah also speaks of “all Israel” being back in the land (Neh 12:47). The remnant that returned from Babylon is represented as “the nation” (Mal 1:1, et al.). The same is true in the New Testament. Our Lord is said to have offered Himself to the nation, “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 10:5-6; 15:24). Tribes other than Judah are mentioned specifically in the NT as being represented in the land (Mt 4:13, 15; Lk 2:36; Acts 4:36; Phil 3:5; “the twelve tribes,” Acts 26:7; Jas 1:1).

Anna knew her tribal identity was of the tribe of Asher (Lk 2:36). Paul knew he was of the tribe of Benjamin, a “Jew” and an “Israelite” (Rom 11:1). The New Testament speaks of “Israel” 75 times and uses the word “Jew” 174 times (Acts 21:39; 22:3; Rom 11:1; 2 Cor 4:11:22; Phil 3:5, etc.). At the Feast of Pentecost Peter cries, “Ye men of Judea” (Acts 2:14), “ye men of Israel...” (Acts 2:22), and “All the house of Israel” (Acts 2:36).

To Be Regathered as One

Ezekiel 36 and 37, the Dry Bones Vision, declares that Judah (Jews) and Israel (10 tribes) shall be joined as one in the regathering (Ezek 37:16-17, 21-22). *This is true today.* [The total physical descendants were not the people to whom the promises were made (Rom 9:4-7).]

Anti-Semitism

Accompanying some of the legends of the so-called “Ten Lost Tribes” are aspersions on the present State of Israel and the people being regathered in the Land. These various theories such as “British Israelism”

are by their nature anti-Semitic because they deny the Jewish people their proper place in the plan of God. Let’s remember that Genesis 12:3 has never been repealed!

Israel is being regathered in the land just as God has announced (Ezek 36, 37; Isa 11:11, et al.). There is yet to come an event which will awaken them to realize that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob once again has His hand upon them (Ezek 38, 39). The Throne of David was promised to the Son of Mary (Lk 1:32). I believe His taking possession of it is on the near horizon. But there are even deeper lessons to learn from the dismal history we’re studying:

2) The Cost of Idolatry

From Solomon (and his foreign wives) through *both* northern and southern kingdoms, idolatry lurks as the key—but unappreciated—issue.

What is “Idolatry”?

Origin of idolatry occurred in the days of Enosh: (English mistranslated):

And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enosh: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD.

Gen esis 4:26

The Rabbinical literature translates it quite differently:

...desisted from praying in the name... Targum of Onkelos
...surnamed their idols in the name... Targum of Jonathan

Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishna* (a constituent part of the Talmud), A.D. 1168, ascribes the origin of idolatry to the days of Enosh. Kimchi, Rashi, and other ancient Jewish commentators agree. Jerome indicated that this was the opinion of many Jews of his day. The main fountainhead of idolatry emerged from Babel, then Babylon. And this legacy can be traced through the ancient empires to Greece and Rome, through the Medieval period to the present day, and will receive its climactic judgment at the end time (Cf. Isa 13, 14; Jer 50, 51; Rev 17, 18). More on this later.

We’ve already read about *Ashtoreth* (Judg 2:13; 10:6; cf. 1 Sam 31:10; 1 Kgs 11:5,33); and the “Groves” (phallic symbols), (Deut 16:21); the Abomination of Sidonians, (2 Kgs 23:3,6,7; Ezek 36:15). Idolatry consists in revering the created thing rather than the creator. Behind the worship of sun, moon and stars are the demonic powers of the heavenly realm (1

Cor 10:20). Angels, fallen and unfallen, are God's instruments in the government of the physical world and nature (Heb 2:5). Seeking answers about the future in the stars, then or now, brings us under the control of demonic agencies—to our own harm and destruction. But the existence of powerful counterfeits in the world strongly suggests that there exists a real body of truth that was lost, or corrupted by the god of this world.

“All gods of the nations are idols...”(Ps 96:5); “Little children, keep yourself from idols” (1Jn 5:21; 1 Cor 14). Covetousness = idolatry (Col 3:5; 1 Cor 5:10).

God's Challenge

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements —surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it? Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this. Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness, that you may take it to its territory and that you may discern the paths to its home. Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose the cords of Orion? Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season, or can you guide the Bear with its children? Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on the earth?

Job 38

The Psalms contain caustic indictments of idolatry:

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.

Psalm 115:4-8; cf. Psalm 135:15-18

Is an idol false and empty? Those who live for them become false and empty. Is the world harsh and unforgiving? Those who live for the world become harsh and unforgiving. [Those who live for Christ become *like* Him!]

The Lessons from the Northern Kingdom

It was the best of times, and it was the worst of times.

Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

The Northern Kingdom, with a successful standing army, recovered to Israel

all the territory lost—even the possession of Damascus. They enjoyed *material prosperity* unequaled since days of Solomon (2 Kgs 14:25-28; 2 Chr 26:2, 6-15). It was, indeed, “the best of times.” At least, so it seemed from their point of view. However, they also had sunk to their lowest ebb of immorality and idol worship. Deriving from their idolatry, other sins denounced by Hosea included social injustice, (Hosea 12:7) violent crime (Hosea 4:2; 6:9; 12:1), religious hypocrisy (Hosea 6:6), political rebellion (Hosea 7:3-7), dependence upon foreign alliances (Hosea 7:11; 8:9), selfish arrogance (Hosea 13:6), and spiritual ingratitude (v). It was also, indeed, “the worst of times.” Particularly from God's point of view.

Hosea's Message

Hosea was a prophet (or seer) who was called out of Judah to declare God's indictment against the Northern Kingdom. (Almost a century later, Jeremiah would be called to render a similar service to the Southern Kingdom.) This is the burden of Hosea: that although a loving and caring God had provided their abundance and prosperity, their sin, disloyalty and abandonment of Him will force Him to vindicate His justice with judgment. After detailing the indictments against the nation, Hosea then declares that God is going to use their enemies as His instrument of judgment. Shortly they will be history...

An Uncomfortable Parallel?

The parallels with America are very, very disturbing. We, too, are experiencing unprecedented prosperity. People are purchasing their third and fourth cars. Almost every home has at least one computer. It's difficult to find a pedestrian without a cellular phone in his ear or on his belt. Fuel for our cars costs less than the bottle of water we drink. It is, indeed, “the best of times.” Or so it seems.

And yet we have sunk to moral depths lower than could have been imagined only a generation ago. We are so “sophisticated” that we condone homosexuality as an “alternative life-style.” We murder babies that are socially inconvenient. We change marriage partners like a fashion statement. We have abandoned the sanctity of commitment in our marriages *and* in our business enterprises. Our entertainment industry celebrates adultery, fornication, violence, aberrant sex practices, and every imaginable form of evil. We have become the world's leading exporters of all that God abhors. It certainly is “the worst of times” from *His* point of view. God rebuked Israel for their brutality: there was murder, there was violence, and there was warfare. We, too, have

had Waco... and Columbine High School. New York City has recorded more crimes than England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Switzerland, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, and Denmark, *combined*.¹ And we, too, have had Vietnam, Kosovo, et al. We should have been sending Bibles, not bullets and bombs. Missionaries, not missiles.

Immorality and deceit have also come to characterize the highest offices of our nation as well. Our politics have condoned and covered up more murders than we dare list. Our public enterprises have been prostituted to the convenience of the elite. We have clearly disconnected character from destiny. There is nothing new in the so-called “new morality.” They practiced it in 700 B.C. and were ultimately destroyed as a result. And so may we be. Israel had neglected the Word of God for two hundred years. *So have we.*

All this is but a mirror of the American soul. Behind all of our problems is the big problem: *that we are not recognizing God.* We are virtually ignorant of God’s Word. We have outlawed Him from our schools and exiled Him from our lives. The minute you get away from the Word of God, you are doomed to failure in both your Christian life and your national life.

The Prognosis for America

“It could never happen here.” That was the cry in Eastern Europe, doubting that Communism would ever take over. Yet it did. This also is the presumption that pervades our own country regarding God’s judgment. It is the slogan of a fool in ignorance of God’s nature and His commitments.

Yet, let’s take an honest, hard look at ourselves. We are hated by major segments—one might say most—of the world’s population. As you read this, alliances are being formed between Russia, China, and Islamic countries against us. Weapons of mass destruction are becoming increasingly available, and America’s defenses are rapidly being depleted, dissipated, and appearing increasingly inadequate. (Cf. Our briefing package, *Behold A Red Horse - Wars and Rumors of Wars.*)

Is it too late? We would seem to be ripe for judgment. Have we crossed the Rubicon? Is it too late? Some think so. Yet, remember Nineveh. This pagan capital ruled the world for several centuries. And it was *scheduled* for God’s judgment. It was 40 days from “ground zero!”

Then God called Jonah, the Reluctant Prophet. He wasn’t excited about the assignment until God explained it to him a bit more clearly. And Jonah wasn’t very tactful in his message: “Forty days and you get yours!”

Then, the biggest miracle in the Old Testament occurred: within those forty days the king on down *all repented!* And the kingdom was spared for almost another century! God, we must remember, is in the miracle business... God has declared His clear and exciting principle:

If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

2 Chronicles 7:14

This is not addressed to our President, our Congress, or our population in general: It is addressed to “My people, who are called by my name.” It is addressed to the Body of Christ. If *we* will humble ourselves, and pray, and seek His face, and turn from *our* wicked ways—*then* He will forgive our sin and *heal our land.*

We need a national revival—but it must begin with you and me. It is our sin that is standing in the way of what God would prefer to do: to have America continue as a beachhead for the Gospel to a hurting world.

It’s up to us. It’s high time we got serious about it.

* * *

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) List the arguments against the myth of the “Ten Lost Tribes.”
- 2) List examples of idolatry in our culture today.

Discussion Questions

(“Where two people agree, one is redundant.”)

- 1) Discuss the possible parallels between the Northern Kingdom and America.

Notes:

1. James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, Vol. 1, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids MI, 1983, pp. 38-39.

Session 7 1 Kings 17 - 19

Ahab’s punishment (ch. 17-18); Ahab’s wicked wife (ch. 19)

Ahab's punishment (ch. 17-18)

Like the coming of a meteor flashing across the dark, midnight sky, so was the coming of Elijah in the darkness of Israel's spiritual night. With the arrival of Elijah, the process of direct revelation, suspended since the days of Joshua, commenced again. By substituting Baal worship for the worship of Jehovah in Israel, Jezebel had challenged the existence of the living God. God's answer to Baal worship was his mighty prophet, Elijah (*my God is Jahweh or Jehovah*) the Tishbite.

1 Kings 17

- 1] And Elijah the Tishbite, *who was* of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, *As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.*

Tishbe was in Gilead, between the Jarmuk and Jabbok Rivers in Trans-Jordan. Elijah announced that discipline was about to fall upon Ahab and Jezebel in particular, and upon the land of Israel. The punishment was to be in the form of a drought of three years and six months duration. Note the appropriateness of this punitive measure. The people of Israel had turned from Jehovah to the folk gods of the Baalim, the gods of the fertility cult. They needed to be reminded that Jehovah, the God of Israel, controls the elements and hence all fertility and life. Therefore rain was to be withheld from the land.

Why 3½ Years?

Not mentioned in the OT; but confirmed in the NT: Lk 4:25; Jas 5:17. [Elijah appears at the Transfiguration: Mt 17. Discussion had to do with the 2nd Coming: 2 Pet 1:13-20 Is Elijah one of the "Two Witnesses"? Rev 11:3-6.] Does this link with a half of the 70th Week of Daniel?

Elijah walked into the court of Ahab and Jezebel and gave them the latest weather report. He said it was not going to rain except by his word and he was leaving town—he had no intention of saying the word. Then he walked out of the court just as dramatically as he had walked in. I think Ahab and Jezebel were taken aback because they never dreamed anyone could speak out so boldly. They will find out that Elijah has a habit of speaking out.

Elijah

You get the impression that Elijah was a rugged individual, and he was. But there's something else that should be said here about him—God had to train this man. God has always had a method of training the men He uses by taking

them to the desert. You will recall that that is where He trained Moses. God took Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees and placed him in a land with rugged terrain. God did the same for John the Baptist, and the apostle Paul spent at least two full years out in the Arabian desert.

Elijah had been and was being prepared by the Lord to demonstrate to all Israel that YHWH, not Baal, is still the only true God. Even Elijah's name means "Yahweh is my God." Elijah lived in Gilead east of the Jordan River near a community called Tishbe. Perhaps as Elijah heard reports of Jezebel's increasing maneuverings to replace the worship of the Lord with Baal worship his godly heart was stirred up. God gave him a mission. Armed with God's promise he walked westward to Samaria. Bursting into the palace, he hurled his ultimatum at King Ahab. He claimed that the LORD is the God of Israel, that He is alive (cf. v. 12; 18:10), and that he, Elijah, was God's servant.

Elijah could confidently declare that there would be neither dew nor rain because God had promised to withhold these from the land if His people turned from Him to other gods (Lev 26:18-19; Deut 11:16-17; 28:23-24). God had apparently revealed to Elijah that He would honor that promise in Elijah's day. This would have struck at the heart of Baalism, for Baal-worshippers believed that their god was the god of rain! The drought, brought on by the true God, showed that He, not Baal, controls the weather.

- 2] And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,
3] Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that *is* before Jordan.

That is, eastward from Samaria, toward the Jordan. The brook Cherith is one of several brooks that empty into the Jordan. Though its exact identification is unknown, tradition locates it at Wadi el Kelt. This location constituted a suitable hiding place from the wrath of Ahab and Jezebel.

- 4] And it shall be, *that* thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.
5] So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that *is* before Jordan.
6] And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.

Elijah obeyed the LORD, who miraculously provided for him as He had promised. God directed ravens, birds that normally neglect their own young (cf. Job 38:41), to bring bread and meat faithfully to Elijah every morning and evening. And he drank water from the brook. The Hebrew word for "bread" (*lehem*) means food in general, possibly including

berries, fruit, nuts, eggs, etc. (Perhaps they were brought from a distance where the drought had not yet affected the vegetation.) Through this unusual manner of nourishing His prophet physically, God was also nourishing Elijah's faith for later feats of spiritual strength

- 7] And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.
8] And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,
9] Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which *belongeth* to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.

Zarephath: (in the LXX, Sarepta) a town on the Mediterranean coast between Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia, the homeland of Jezebel (cf. 16:31) and the heart of Baal-Melqart territory (Zarephath was 80-90 miles from Brook Cherith.) God told Elijah that a widow would feed him (cf. Luke 4:25-26). Going to a widow for food was a strange directive: Widows were usually poor people; normally they ran out of food first in a famine. This famine had been created by the drought.

- 10] So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman *was* there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.
11] And as she was going to fetch *it*, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.
12] And she said, *As* the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, *I am* gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

The Widow

She recognized Elijah as an Israelite and at the same time she invited a divine curse upon herself if the words she was about to utter were not true, i.e., that she and her son were about to eat their last meal.

Here was a *Gentile* woman in Phoenicia who believed in the Lord; she said she believed He is alive ("As the Lord thy God liveth"; cf. v. 1; 18:10).

- 13] And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go *and* do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring *it* unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.
14] For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day *that* the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.

Elijah calmed her fears of himself, her hunger, and her imminent death. He asked her to feed him first and then use what was left to feed herself and her son. Then he gave her a promise on the authority of the word of God: she would have food until the drought ended.

- 15] And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat *many* days.
16] *And* the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

Her obedient response demonstrated her faith in the word of the LORD. The Lord honored her faith by fulfilling His promise miraculously. This miracle of God's continually supplying flour and olive oil was another polemic (protest) against Baal, just as was the drought. Baal-worshippers believed he was a fertility god, giving rain to make crops grow. But he could not overcome the drought to make wheat and olive trees grow. Only the true God could provide flour and oil in a drought!

- 17] And it came to pass after these things, *that* the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him.
18] And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?

Some time later (cf. v. 7)—again the exact time is not given—tragedy befell Elijah's hostess. The woman who owned the house was the widow. Her young son fell ill and finally stopped breathing. [Some Bible critics say the boy was only unconscious, not dead, and that his restoration was therefore not a miracle. However, verses 18, 20, 22-23 make it clear that he had actually died.]

The woman had a guilty conscience and immediately concluded that God was punishing her for her sin by killing her son. This is a common reaction among many people who do not know God's ways well when personal tragedy enters their lives (cf. John 9:2-3). What sin she was referring to is not stated.

- 19] And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed.

The boy was small enough to be carried in his mother's arms. Many homes in Palestine at that time had guest rooms built on their roofs.

- 20] And he cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?

Elijah's first prayer simply expressed his compassion for the woman who, in addition to the trials of the famine, now also had to bear this tragedy. Implicit in the prayer was the desire that God relieve her of this added burden.

- 21] And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again.

Often in cases of miraculous restoration and healing, God's servant placed his hand on the afflicted one to indicate that the power of God in him was passing to the needy individual (e.g., Mt 8:3). In this instance Elijah out of heartfelt concern stretched himself out placing the whole body of the lad in contact with his own. Three times Elijah did this, praying each time that God would restore the boy's life. Persistence in prayer is a fundamental requisite for obtaining one's petitions (cf. Mt 7:7-8; Lk 11:5-13). It proved effective in this case.

- 22] And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.

God miraculously restored the boy's life. This is the first recorded instance in Scripture of restoration to life of one who had died.

- 23] And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth.
24] And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou *art* a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth *is* truth.

This miracle proved to the woman that Elijah was indeed a man of God and that the word of the LORD that Elijah claimed to speak was indeed the truth. The fact that this was done to a Gentile is a key theme in Jesus' sermon at Capernaum, for which they tried to throw Him off a cliff (Lk 4:26-29). Why?

1 Kings 18

- 1] And it came to pass *after* many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.

In the third and last year of the famine God directed Elijah to present himself to King Ahab. Elijah had God's word that He would soon end the drought.

- 2] And Elijah went to shew himself unto Ahab. And *there* was a sore famine in Samaria.

The famine in the land was particularly severe in the capital, Samaria. (Cf. the famine[s] in Elisha's days, 2 Kgs 4:38; 6:25; 7:4; 8:1.) God was directing this calamity especially at the guilty parties, Ahab and Jezebel.

- 3] And Ahab called Obadiah, which *was* the governor of *his* house. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly:

Obadiah had great responsibility in Ahab's court (in charge of Ahab's palace). Obadiah was also a devout believer in the LORD (but not the writer of the Bible book of that name).

- 4] For it was *so*, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.)

Whether Jezebel knew of Obadiah's commitment to the Lord is not clear, but undoubtedly he and the queen were not close friends. Jezebel's aim was to kill the Lord's prophets and replace the worship of Yahweh with Baal-Melqart worship. Obadiah, aware of her strategy, had hidden 100 prophets of the Lord in caves and was supplying them with food and water—a difficult task in days of extreme famine and drought. Obviously there were many in Israel who believed in the Lord, though Israel as a whole had apostatized.

- 5] And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts.
6] So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself.

This situation prompted Ahab and his trusted servant, Obadiah, to go in different directions, looking for some grass in the valleys or near the springs where the most necessary animals (horses and mules) might graze.

- 7] And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, *Art* thou that my lord Elijah?

Obadiah recognized Elijah when they met somewhere outside Samaria; Elijah was a "wanted" man in Israel. Out of respect for the prophet, Obadiah bowed down to the ground. He could hardly believe he had found Elijah.

- 8] And he answered him, I *am*: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah *is here*.
9] And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldst deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me?

Obadiah, however, was afraid that Elijah would disappear again.

- 10] *As* the LORD thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, *He is not there*; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not.

Obadiah explained to the prophet how Ahab had searched for him at home and abroad (v. 10) to no avail. Obadiah affirmed that fact by the familiar words, As surely as the LORD your God lives (cf. 17:1, 12).

- 11] And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah *is here*.
12] And it shall come to pass, *as soon as* I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the LORD shall carry thee whither I know not; and *so* when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the LORD from my youth.

If he reported to his king that Elijah had been found, and then could not produce him, Ahab would regard Obadiah's words as a mocking trick and would probably execute him. (His fears were not altogether groundless, as may be learned from 2 Kings 2, where we read that Elijah was carried into the other world in a fiery chariot!)

- 13] Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the LORD, how I hid an hundred men of the LORD'S prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water?

To convince Elijah that his concern was sincere, Obadiah related proof that he was a devout believer in the LORD (cf. v. 3) since his youth. Obadiah seemed to think Elijah would have heard about his hiding and feeding the prophets of the LORD. Perhaps this was known among many of the faithful in Israel, especially the prophets, though of course not by Jezebel or her sympathizers.

- 14] And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah *is here*: and he shall slay me.
15] And Elijah said, *As* the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day.

Elijah's description of God as the LORD Almighty who lives and whom Elijah served (cf. 17:1; 18:36) indicates that he was confident in God's ability to handle the physical and spiritual situation in Israel, an assurance that had grown as a result of his experiences at Cherith and Zarephath.

Elijah at Mt. Carmel

- 16] So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah.
17] And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, *Art* thou he that troubleth Israel?

When Ahab heard Obadiah's message the king went to meet the prophet; Elijah maintained the initiative as the spokesman of God to whom the king must submit. In Ahab's eyes Elijah was the troubler of Israel.

- 18] And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim.

Elijah met Ahab's insinuating remarks forthrightly by casting the challenge back into his face. Elijah set the record straight and instructed the king who did not perceive or was not willing to admit that *he* and his father's (Omri's) family (cf. 16:25-26) were the real reason for Israel's troubles. Ahab had abandoned the LORD's commands in His Law and had instead followed the Baals.

The plural "Baalim" refers to local idols of Baal (cf. Judg 2:11) sometimes with differing names (e.g., Baal-Berith, Judg 8:33; Baal-Zebub, 2 Kgs 1:2-3, 6, 16). This was the real issue and the root cause of all the trouble in Israel, spiritual as well as physical.

- 19] Now therefore send, *and* gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table.

In view of Elijah's directive that Ahab summon the people from all over Israel, it is likely that hundreds, if not thousands, congregated on Mount Carmel. The Carmel range of mountains, 1,742 feet in elevation at its highest point, extends about 30 miles to the southeast of modern-day Haifa from the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. It is a beautiful series of rounded peaks and valleys from which the sea can easily be seen. It was a geographically prominent location and thus a fit setting for Elijah's contest. (It is not known exactly where along this ridge Elijah staged this test; any of several sites is possible; Muhraka is suggested by many as one of the more probable sites.) The extent of Baal worship in Israel can be estimated by the number of priests Jezebel regularly fed: 450 prophets of the male god and 400 of the female goddess Asherah ("groves"), Baal's consort.

- 20] So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel.

Mount Carmel was agreed on by Ahab. It would be a fitting site since it lay between Israel and Phoenicia, the lands of the deities in question. Also Mount Carmel was regarded by the Phoenicians as the sacred dwelling place of Baal. No doubt Ahab was highly pleased with this suggested site for the contest because it would have given the Baal prophets a definite advantage; but this did not worry Elijah.

- 21] And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD *be* God, follow him: but if Baal, *then* follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

Rather, *How long go ye hobbling between the two forks of the road?* Whichever translation one takes, the meaning is crystal clear: The issue was before them; A clear decision must be made. If Baal was to be god, Jehovah must be renounced. If Jehovah was to reign as God, Baal and all his worship must be forever abandoned. Many in Israel were being tempted to compromise. When all the people had assembled Elijah stood before them and challenged them to end their doublemindedness, wavering between two opinions.

22] Then said Elijah unto the people, I, *even* I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets *are* four hundred and fifty men.

Elijah then pointed out that in this contest the odds would be 450 prophets to 1—a humanly impossible situation in which to win! Elijah knew there were other prophets of Yahweh besides himself (cf. v. 13), but as far as this contest was concerned he was the only one of the LORD's prophets left. [Elijah would also introduce a 3:1 additional handicap (v.34).]

23] Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay *it* on wood, and put no fire *under*: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay *it* on wood, and put no fire *under*:

24] And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken.

Each side would prepare to sacrifice its bull as a burnt offering to its god. Then they would each call on their god and the god who answered by fire would be shown to be the true God. Baal was supposedly a fertility god, the one who sent rain, caused the crops to grow, and provided food for his people. He was the one who supposedly sent fire (lightning) from heaven. The three-and-one-half-year drought and famine had been a great embarrassment to the worshipers of Baal. It seemed as if Elijah and his God rather than Baal were in control of the fertility of Israel. So Elijah's test to Baal's followers seemed like a good opportunity to vindicate their god and they readily agreed to it. When the preparations were completed, the test began.

25] And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress *it* first; for ye *are* many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire *under*.

26] And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed *it*, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But *there was* no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made.

27] And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he *is* a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.

At noon Elijah began to taunt them, mocking their ineffectiveness. With amusing and bold sarcasm, he suggested that perhaps Baal was thinking about other things, or “pursuing” (עִוָּה *siyg* lit., relieving himself!), away on a trip (the Phoenician sailors believed Baal traveled with them on the Mediterranean Sea and elsewhere), or even sleeping!

28] And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them.

Characteristically Baal's prophets responded by increasing the fervor of their appeals, working themselves into a frenzy. To propitiate their god they mutilated their own bodies as the custom of pagan worshipers has been for centuries.

29] And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the *time* of the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that *there was* neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded.

This continued for three hours (the time for the Israelites' evening sacrifice; cf. v. 36, was 3 P.M.), but still there was no response. Baal did not respond to their six-hour chanting for lightning, (though rain and lightning often come readily to the Carmel mountain range near the Mediterranean Sea). Mount Carmel overlooks the Bay of Haifa and the blue Mediterranean Sea. It is a long ridge; and way out yonder to the east is Megiddo in the valley of Esdraelon.

In this dramatic spot the lone, majestic figure of Elijah stood apart. He was detached. I think he looked bored after a few minutes of the performance by Baal's prophets. Then that ironic smile crossed his face and you could hear the acid sarcasm in his voice. He used the rapier of ridicule. He taunted and jeered at these prophets. And finally, with wilting scorn, he waved them aside.

30] And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD *that was* broken down.

Gather around me, folks. When it was obvious to all that the prophets of Baal had failed, Elijah invited all the people to draw near and observe what he would do.

31] And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name:

An altar to the LORD had been built on the site long before but it was in disrepair. Elijah selected 12 stones, one for each of the tribes. Though the tribes had been divided into two nations they were still one people in God's purposes—with a single Lord, a single covenant, and a single destiny.

32] And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed.

33] And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid *him* on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour *it* on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood.

After the bull had been slain and laid on the wood, Elijah gave another strange directive: He called for an additional handicap! He called for the whole sacrifice and its wood to be *soaked with water three separate times*.

- 34] And he said, Do *it* the second time. And they did *it* the second time. And he said, Do *it* the third time. And they did *it* the third time.
35] And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water.

The excess water even filled the trench. The water—four large jars filled three times each!—probably was collected from a spring on the mountain or in the Kishon Valley below (v. 40), or from the Mediterranean Sea. The purpose of this soaking, of course, was to show everyone present that the burning of the sacrifice that was to take place was not a natural phenomenon or a trick but was a miracle. Also the time involved in securing the water would have added to the tension of the hour.

- 36] And it came to pass at *the time of* the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou *art* God in Israel, and *that I am* thy servant, and *that I have done* all these things at thy word.

At the time of the Israelites' evening sacrifice (3 P.M.; cf. v. 29), Elijah stepped forward and prayed. Without any of the theatrics of his adversaries Elijah simply addressed God as one addresses another living person. His words were designed to demonstrate to the onlookers that all he had done as God's servant (cf. 17:1; 18:15) had been in obedience to God's command and not on the prophet's own initiative.

- 37] Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou *art* the LORD God, and *that* thou hast turned their heart back again.
38] Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that *was* in the trench.
39] And when all the people saw *it*, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he *is* the God; the LORD, he *is* the God.

Spontaneously the crowd cried out in amazement. Since the LORD (Yahweh) had answered by fire (cf. v. 24); they acknowledged that He is the true God.

- 40] And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.

The Kishon Valley ran parallel to the Carmel range on its north side. There the people slaughtered the false prophets in obedience to the command of God through Moses (Deut 13:12-15) and Elijah.

- 41] And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for *there is* a sound of abundance of rain.
42] So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees,

Ahab rode off down the mountain to celebrate the end of the drought by eating and drinking, but Elijah walked back up the mountain to pray for rain. His posture as he prayed reflected the earnestness of his petition, again for the glory of the Lord.

- 43] And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, *There is* nothing. And he said, Go again seven times.

Rains normally came from the west off the Mediterranean Sea, so Elijah instructed his servant to look in that direction.

- 44] And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare *thy chariot*, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.
45] And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel.

At first the rain cloud was small (like a man's hand), but soon the whole sky grew black and heavy rain descended. The torrent evidently overtook Ahab as he rode in his chariot to Jezreel, his winter capital about midway between Mount Carmel and Samaria.

- 46] And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

Elijah overtook him, running the approximate 25 miles with divinely given energy. Tucking his cloak into his belt enabled him to run without tripping over the long garment (cf. Job 38:3; 40:7). Because of Mount Carmel Elijah had discredited Baal and his worshipers, but he had also humiliated vindictive Queen Jezebel.

1 Kings 19

Ahab's Wicked Wife

- 1] And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.
2] Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do *to me*, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.

Jezebel had not been present on Mount Carmel; her husband reported to her what had taken place. Infuriated by Elijah's treatment of her

prophets . . . Jezebel sent a message to him. He was evidently still in the city of Jezreel as she was (cf. 18:46) when he received her warning. She threatened to take his life within 24 hours in retaliation for his slaughtering the 450 Baal prophets.

- 3] And when he saw *that*, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which *belongeth* to Judah, and left his servant there.
- 4] But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I *am* not better than my fathers.

That is, into the Negev, to the south of Judah. Not allowing himself the comfort of a city, obviously for fear of detection by one of Jezebel's spies, he retreated into the wilderness. It is remarkable that Jezebel's threat terrified Elijah as it did. Ironically by contrast he had told the widow in Zarephath not to be afraid (17:13). He had just demonstrated that the gods to whom she now appealed in her curse had no power at all. (Her statement that she was willing to be dealt with severely by the gods [cf. 2:23; 20:10; 2 Kgs 6:31] points up the seriousness of her threat. She was so certain she would kill Elijah that she willingly put her own welfare "on the line.") Evidently Elijah's fear sprang from the power Jezebel possessed.

Rather than resting in God for His protection as he had for the past three and one-half years, Elijah ran for his life. He ran all the way through the kingdom of Judah to the southernmost town in the land, Beersheba.

- 5] And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, *Arise and eat*.

Still fearful he might be discovered by Jezebel's spies he told his servant to stay behind and he traveled alone one more day's journey (about 15 miles) into the Negev desert. Finally he sat down under a broom tree (a desert bush that grows to a height of 12 feet and provides some, though not much, shade) and rested. He was so discouraged he prayed that he might die.

Elijah had forgotten the lessons God had been teaching him at Kerith, Zarephath, and Carmel. His eyes were on his circumstances rather than on the LORD. His statement that he was no better than his ancestors (19:4) suggests that he was no more successful than his forefathers in ousting Baal-worship from Israel. Exhausted and discouraged, Elijah lay down and fell asleep.

- 6] And he looked, and, behold, *there was* a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again.

Elijah woke at the touch of a divinely sent messenger. This angel had prepared freshly baked bread, still warm, and plenty of water, which he invited Elijah to consume. The prophet did so and then returned to his rest. The angel probably appeared as a human being as was common in the Old Testament.

- 7] And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, *Arise and eat*; because the journey *is* too great for thee.

Again the angel woke Elijah, perhaps after he had slept for some time, and urged him to eat more food since the journey before him would require much energy.

- 8] And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.

Moses and the Israelites had traveled in that wilderness for 40 years, sustained by the manna God had provided for them and learned lessons of His faithful care and provision. Now Elijah would traverse the same desert for 40 days and nights, sustained by the bread God provided and would learn the same lessons. [Reminds me of another "Angel of the Lord" who cooked breakfast on the shore of the Sea of Galilee in John 20.] God was reminding him and teaching him during those 40 days and nights. Finally He went to the mountain of God, the very place where God had revealed Himself to Moses and the Israelites and where He had entered into a covenant with His Chosen People. A direct trip from Beersheba to Mount Horeb (the ancient name for Mount Sinai; cf. Ex 3:1; 17:6; 33:6; Deut 5:2; 1 Kgs 8:9; Ps 106:19; Mal 4:4) would have taken Elijah only about 7-10 days on foot (a distance of approximately 140 miles). [Now confirmed to be in Midian (NW Arabia) at *Jabal Al Lawz*.]

- 9] And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?

Elijah found a cave and took refuge in it. There he received a revelation from God. The LORD began this lesson with the question, What are you doing here, Elijah? (cf. v. 13; Gen 3:9) God had not sent him here as He had directed him to other places (cf. 1 Kgs 17:3, 9; 18:1); Elijah had run out because of fear (19:3).

- 10] And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, *even* I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.

Elijah's response revealed that he felt he was standing completely alone and defenseless against the ungodly forces that threatened to overpower him (cf. v. 14). Of course he knew that he was not the only one left of all the faithful remnant (cf. 18:13), but he felt all alone. In solitude and loneliness he bewailed his fate before the Lord. Had these words not been uttered in a state of emotional distress, they would have been inexcusable. But God deals tenderly with his overwrought children. The prophet's words taken at face value—which indeed they cannot be—practically accuse God of infidelity. I, even I only, am left. See Paul's comment on this experience (Rom 11:2-4). Interestingly Elijah spoke only of the Lord's prophets being killed (cf. 18:13a); he made no mention of Baal's 450 prophets who were killed. Fear and discouragement caused him to see only the dark side. He sensed failure in spite of his being zealous. Mercifully God did not lecture Elijah or chasten His chafed prophet. God simply gave him a demonstration of His ways.

- 11] And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; *but* the LORD *was* not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; *but* the LORD *was* not in the earthquake:
 12] And after the earthquake a fire; *but* the LORD *was* not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.

Standing on the mountainside outside his cave (cf. v. 9) Elijah witnessed what Moses had seen in those mountains centuries before (Ex. 19:16-18) and what he himself had seen on Mount Carmel only a few days earlier (1 Kings 18:38, 45), namely, a spectacular demonstration of the power of God, this time in wind, an earthquake, and fire. But on this occasion the LORD was not in any of these, that is, they were not His instruments of self-revelation. After the fire “a still small voice”: Hebrew, רִמְמָה רַקָּה *a sound of gentle stillness*.

- 13] And it was *so*, when Elijah heard *it*, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, *there came* a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?

Evidently some time later when Elijah was back in his cave (19:13) he heard the sound of a gentle whisper. Recognizing this as a revelation of God he pulled his cloak over part of his face, walked out to the mouth of the cave, and stood there waiting for God to act. God asked the same question He asked earlier (cf. v. 9): What are you doing here, Elijah?

- 14] And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and

slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, *even* I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.

The prophet's response was identical to his first reply (cf. v. 10), suggesting that even though he may have understood the point of God's display of natural forces for his benefit he still felt the same way about himself. The message God seems to have intended for Elijah is that whereas He had revealed Himself in spectacular demonstrations of His power in the past at Kerith, Zarephath, and Carmel, He would now use Elijah in gentler, less dramatic ways. These ways God proceeded to explain to His servant (vv. 15-18). God would deal with Elijah's personal feelings about himself later in a gentle way too.

- 15] And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael *to be* king over Syria:
 16] And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint *to be* king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint *to be* prophet in thy room.
 17] And it shall come to pass, *that* him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay.

The LORD told Elijah to leave there, to go back the way he came (i.e., through Israel) to Damascus. (Cf. God's commands “leave” and “go” to Elijah in 17:3, 9; 18:1; 21:18; 2 Kgs 1:3, 15.) The Lord then gave him three assignments: to anoint Hazael king of the Arameans in Damascus, to anoint Jehu king of Israel, and to anoint Elisha from Abel Meholah (cf. Jud. 7:22) as his own successor. These three individuals, though differing in vocation and character, would yet be united in the humbling and desecrating of the house of Ahab and complete the purge of Baal worship that Elijah had begun. Actually Elijah did only the last of these three directly, but he did the other two indirectly through Elisha, his protege. Elisha was involved, though strangely, in Hazael's becoming Aram's king (2 Kgs 8:7-14) and one of Elisha's associates anointed Jehu (2 Kgs 9:1-3).

- 18] Yet I have left *me* seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.

God then revealed to Elijah that He had preserved 7,000 faithful followers in Israel who had not bowed before or kissed the emblems of idolatry in worship. Such news undoubtedly cheered Elijah. Were it not for the insight into his feelings of fear and discouragement given in this chapter, one might not believe that Elijah was indeed “a man just like us” (James 5:17).

- 19] So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who *was* plowing *with* twelve yoke *of oxen* before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him.

Elijah returned from the Sinai peninsula to find Elisha (whose name means “My God is salvation”) near his hometown of Abel Meholah (v. 16) in the Jordan Valley about halfway between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Kinnereth in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Elisha evidently came from a family that owned lots of land (as implied by the 12 yoke of oxen). Throwing a prophet’s cloak around a person symbolized the passing of the power and authority of the office to that individual.

- 20] And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and *then* I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee?

That Elisha realized the meaning of this act is obvious from his reaction. Immediately he started to abandon his former occupation and follow Elijah. Elijah gave him permission to say farewell to his family. The unusual reply, What have I done to you? is an idiom meaning, “Do as you please” or “What have I done to stop you?”

- 21] And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him.

Elisha sealed his decision by slaughtering his yoke of oxen and burning his plowing implements. He evidently hosted a farewell banquet, serving his sacrificed animals to his guests for supper. Then he set out to accompany Elijah as his attendant. 2 Kings will focus on the remarkable exploits of this successor.

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) List the miracles performed by Elijah and the significance of each.
- 2) Why did they try to kill Jesus at Capernaum at the beginning of His ministry (Luke 4:25)? What was the point of His sermon there?
- 3) Why is the duration of Elijah’s draught of 3 ½ years reiterated twice in the NT? Why is it significant?

Discussion Questions

(“Where two people agree, one is redundant.”)

- 1) In what ways was Elijah’s performance and reactions relevant to us today?
- 2) How was Elijah prepared for his mission? Are there Elijah’s today?

- 3) Are there miracles today? Give examples and their significance.
- 4) What lessons are there from the Mt. Carmel confrontation?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

Who will be the “Two Witnesses” in Revelation 11? Compile the various conjectures and the evidences for each.

Preparation for Next Session:

Read 1 Kings 20-22. Also read Revelation 2:18-29. How does Jezebel Ahab’s queen figure in with the allusion of our Lord?

Session 8 1 Kings 20 - 22

Ahab’s Aramean adversary (ch. 20); Ahab’s crimes against Naboth (ch. 21); Ahab’s death (22:1-40); Jehoshaphat’s good reign in Judah (22:41-50); The beginning of Ahaziah’s evil reign in Israel (22:51-53)

1 Kings 20

- 1] And Benhadad the king of Syria gathered all his host together: and *there were* thirty and two kings with him, and horses, and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it.

This was the first of three battles recorded in 1 Kings (cf. 20:26-43; 22:1-38) between Ahab and Ben-Hadad II, king of Aram, Israel’s northern neighbor. Ben-Hadad II was evidently the son of Ben-Hadad I whom Asa had hired to attack Baasha some years earlier (cf. 15:18, 20; 20:34). Allied with Ben-Hadad II were 32 kings, probably rulers of neighboring city-states. Together they went up the hill of Samaria and attacked it, placing it under siege. Ben-Hadad then sent messengers to Ahab with his demands for withdrawal.

- 2] And he sent messengers to Ahab king of Israel into the city, and said unto him, Thus saith Benhadad,
- 3] Thy silver and thy gold *is* mine; thy wives also and thy children, *even* the goodliest, *are* mine.
- 4] And the king of Israel answered and said, My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I *am* thine, and all that I have.
- 5] And the messengers came again, and said, Thus speaketh Benhadad, saying, Although I have sent unto thee, saying, Thou shalt deliver me thy silver, and thy gold, and thy wives, and thy children;

- 6] Yet I will send my servants unto thee to morrow about this time, and they shall search thine house, and the houses of thy servants; and it shall be, *that* whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall put *it* in their hand, and take *it* away.

Evidently Ben-Hadad regretted that he had demanded such “easy” terms after Ahab had accepted them. He felt he could get much more than that. So he sent his messengers back with a new demand, namely, that Ben-Hadad’s men be allowed to enter the palace and the officials’ houses and plunder them.

- 7] Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, Mark, I pray you, and see how this *man* seeketh mischief: for he sent unto me for my wives, and for my children, and for my silver, and for my gold; and I denied him not.

Ahab assembled the elders of the land and pointed out that Ben-Hadad was looking for trouble. The king had not refused Ben-Hadad’s demands for his own most valued possessions, but now the Aramean enemy wanted everything of value he could lay his hands on.

- 8] And all the elders and all the people said unto him, Hearken not *unto him*, nor consent.
9] Wherefore he said unto the messengers of Benhadad, Tell my lord the king, All that thou didst send for to thy servant at the first I will do: but this thing I may not do. And the messengers departed, and brought him word again.

Ahab sent his decision back to Ben-Hadad through the messengers: he would hold to his first promise but not to this demand.

- 10] And Benhadad sent unto him, and said, The gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me.

Shortly thereafter Ahab received a third message from his adversary. The Arameans now threatened to destroy Samaria totally. Like Jezebel with Elijah, Ben-Hadad risked his life in an oath (cf. 19:2; also note 2:23).

- 11] And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell *him*, Let not him that girdeth on *his harness* boast himself as he that putteth it off.
12] And it came to pass, when *Benhadad* heard this message, as he *was* drinking, he and the kings in the pavilions, that he said unto his servants, Set *yourselves in array*. And they set *themselves in array* against the city.

Ben-Hadad’s greed and boasting seem to have been heightened since he and his kings were under the influence of strong drink. Since negotiations had broken down Ben-Hadad prepared to attack Samaria.

- 13] And, behold, there came a prophet unto Ahab king of Israel, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? behold, I will deliver it into thine hand this day; and thou shalt know that I *am* the LORD.

Meanwhile, a prophet, whose name is not given, went to Ahab with a message from the LORD. God, he said, was going to deliver the huge Aramean army into Ahab’s hand so Ahab would know that He is the LORD. God’s goodness on this occasion obviously was prompted not by Ahab’s godliness but by God’s own grace. This was another step in His seeking to get His people to acknowledge that He is the LORD.

- 14] And Ahab said, By whom? And he said, Thus saith the LORD, *Even* by the young men of the princes of the provinces. Then he said, Who shall order the battle? And he answered, Thou.

Ahab asked the prophet what strategy should be employed. He responded that the LORD would use the young officers of the provincial commanders of the army. The king himself was to lead them into battle.

- 15] Then he numbered the young men of the princes of the provinces, and they were two hundred and thirty two: and after them he numbered all the people, *even* all the children of Israel, *being* seven thousand.
16] And they went out at noon. But Benhadad *was* drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the thirty and two kings that helped him.
17] And the young men of the princes of the provinces went out first; and Benhadad sent out, and they told him, saying, There are men come out of Samaria.
18] And he said, Whether they be come out for peace, take them alive; or whether they be come out for war, take them alive.
19] So these young men of the princes of the provinces came out of the city, and the army which followed them.

Evidently it was not clear to Ben-Hadad if the 232 men (cf. v. 15) approaching him were coming to talk peace or whether they were intending to fight. This probably resulted in his being unprepared for their attack. The Israelite army (of 7,000; cf. v. 15) followed along behind the young officers and proceeded to rout the Arameans.

- 20] And they slew every one his man: and the Syrians fled; and Israel pursued them: and Benhadad the king of Syria escaped on an horse with the horsemen.
21] And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter.
22] And the prophet came to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee.

After Ahab had returned to Samaria the prophet went to him again. He warned the king, undoubtedly by the word of the Lord, that he should expect Ben-Hadad to attack again in the spring, the most popular time of the year for kings to wage war (cf. 2 Sam 11:1). In view of this Ahab was warned to build up his defenses.

23] And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods *are* gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.

In the camp of the Arameans, Ben-Hadad was also receiving advice. His counselors concluded that they had lost the battle because Israel's gods were gods of the hills. If they would fight Israel on the plains these gods would not help them and the Arameans would win.

24] And do this thing, Take the kings away, every man out of his place, and put captains in their rooms:

25] And number thee an army, like the army that thou hast lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot: and we will fight against them in the plain, *and* surely we shall be stronger than they. And he hearkened unto their voice, and did so.

They also advised the king to replace the 32 allied kings with regular army commanders and to build up his forces to their former numbers. Ben-Hadad followed this advice and prepared to return to Samaria the following spring.

26] And it came to pass at the return of the year, that Benhadad numbered the Syrians, and went up to Aphek, to fight against Israel.

As the Lord had revealed (v. 22), the next spring (856 B.C.) Ben-Hadad assembled his troops and proceeded to Aphek. Several towns in Israel bore this name (meaning "a fortress"). This one may have been located on the tablelands east of the Sea of Kinnereth between Samaria and Damascus. Ben-Hadad chose a flat battleground this time as his counselors had advised.

27] And the children of Israel were numbered, and were all present, and went against them: and the children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids; but the Syrians filled the country.

28] And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD *is* God of the hills, but he *is* not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD.

The man of God, evidently the same prophet (vv. 13, 22), informed Ahab that Israel would win this battle. Again he said that the Lord's purpose was to prove to Ahab (as well as, perhaps, the Arameans and the Israelites) that He is the LORD (cf. v. 13).

29] And they pitched one over against the other seven days. And *so* it was, that in the seventh day the battle was joined: and the children of Israel slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day.

30] But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; and *there* a wall fell upon twenty and seven thousand of the men *that were* left. And Benhadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber.

31] And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel *are* merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life.

32] So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and *put* ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, Thy servant Benhadad saith, I pray thee, let me live. And he said, *Is* he yet alive? he *is* my brother.

Ben-Hadad's agents waited on Ahab and pleaded for Ben-Hadad's life. They called him Ahab's servant, indicating the position he was willing to take if he could live. Ahab seemed surprised that the Aramean king was still alive.

33] Now the men did diligently observe whether *any thing would come* from him, and did hastily catch *it*: and they said, Thy brother Benhadad. Then he said, Go ye, bring him. Then Benhadad came forth to him; and he caused him to come up into the chariot.

Ahab said he was willing to receive Ben-Hadad as his brother. He was, of course, not his real brother; Ahab had in mind a treaty for defense against Assyria in which he and Ben-Hadad would join as brothers. Trained in the technique of discerning the capricious royal will, the servants regarded the query of Ahab as a good omen and hastily laid hold upon it. Thus Ahab bound himself by an oath to save Ben-hadad's life. This was not only the greatest injustice to his own subjects but open opposition to God, who had foretold the victory and had delivered the enemy into his hands.

34] And *Benhadad* said unto him, The cities, which my father took from thy father, I will restore; and thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. Then *said Ahab*, I will send thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away.

Quick to placate his enemy, Ben-Hadad pledged to return the cities his father Ben-Hadad I had taken from Ahab's father (predecessor) Baasha (cf. 15:20). In addition, the Aramean king offered trade privileges to Ahab in Damascus which Ben-Hadad's father had enjoyed in Samaria. The two kings formalized the treaty and with this promise of nonaggression Ahab let Ben-Hadad go back home. [Three years later (853 B.C.) Ahab and Ben-Hadad faced their mutual foe, Assyria, led by mighty King Shalmaneser III (859-824 B.C.) and repelled him at Qarqar on the Orontes River in Aram. Ahab supplied 10,000 troops and 2,000 chariots for this coalition. This battle is not referred to in Scripture but a record of it written by Shalmaneser has survived. It is now in the British Museum. (See James B. Pritchard, ed.,

Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, Princeton University Press, 1955, pp. 278-9.)]

- 35] And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said unto his neighbour in the word of the LORD, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man refused to smite him.

The sons of the prophets were students in the schools of the prophets, well-established institutions in Israel designed to perpetuate the Law of Moses and the Word of the Lord. One of these young men received an assignment from the Lord. His unusual request that his companion injure him with a weapon was by the word of the LORD. The friend's refusal, though understandable, was an act of disobedient rebellion against the Lord.

- 36] Then said he unto him, Because thou hast not obeyed the voice of the LORD, behold, as soon as thou art departed from me, a lion shall slay thee. And as soon as he was departed from him, a lion found him, and slew him.

It was for this reason and the importance of the man of God's mission that the compassionate companion suffered death. Again the LORD used a lion to execute his will (cf. 13:24).

- 37] Then he found another man, and said, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man smote him, so that in smiting he wounded *him*.
38] So the prophet departed, and waited for the king by the way, and disguised himself with ashes upon his face.

The prophet disguised himself using a headband over his eyes. Without this the king would have recognized him immediately as a prophet (cf. 20:41). (Interestingly this is the second time in 1 Kings when a person disguised himself (cf. 14:2). Later Ahab disguised himself in battle (22:30).)

- 39] And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king: and he said, Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver.

Apparently Ahab thought he had met this man before. The prophet told the king that he, the prophet, was told in combat to guard a prisoner who got away. The prophet added that either his own life was to have been taken or he had to pay a talent (ca. 75 pounds) of silver.

- 40] And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So *shall* thy judgment *be*; thyself hast decided *it*.

Ahab quickly assessed the storyteller's guilt; this was an obvious case of negligence.

- 41] And he hasted, and took the ashes away from his face; and the king of Israel discerned him that he *was* of the prophets.
42] And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Because thou hast let go out of *thy* hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people.

The king responded to the prophet in words that judged himself. The prophet, immediately revealing his identity, told the king he had been negligent in his responsibility to obey the order received from God to execute Ben-Hadad. Though this order is not recorded in the Biblical text it is clear that Ahab had received it. Rather than obeying the Lord, which probably would have resulted in a final end of the conflict with the vexing Aramean army, Ahab chose to follow his own plan. He believed Ben-Hadad's help against Assyria would be more valuable to Israel than Ben-Hadad's death. Therefore Ahab would forfeit his own life in exchange for Ben-Hadad's (cf. 1 Kgs 22:37).

This verse is not given to teach Christian morality in the event of a situation involving prisoners of war. Rather, the spiritual principle set forth is that believers must not extend toleration, even in the name of mercy, to the forces of Satan. It had lain within the power of Ahab to end forever the life and death struggle between Syria and Israel. Now with Ben-hadad free, the struggle would continue, with disastrous results.

- 43] And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased, and came to Samaria.

1 Kings 21

A period of peace followed the battle of Aphek (20:26-34). Some time after the battle the events recorded in chapter 21 took place. This incident further illustrates the evil characters of Ahab and Jezebel and enables readers to understand God's dealings with them. It also shows God's faithfulness in fulfilling the prophecies given by Elijah (21:20-24). But this incident also carries profound implications in understanding the Lord's Letter to Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29).

- 1] And it came to pass after these things, *that* Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which *was* in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria.

Naboth was Ahab's near neighbor in Jezreel; they apparently owned adjoining property.

- 2] And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it *is* near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; *or*, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money.

Ahab offered to buy Naboth's vineyard because it was a suitable piece of ground for a vegetable garden he wished to plant. Ahab offered to pay for it with a better vineyard elsewhere or with cash, whichever Naboth might prefer.

- 3] And Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.

Naboth was a God-fearing Israelite. In obedience to the Mosaic Law he refused to sell his paternal inheritance (cf. Lev 25:23-28; Num 36:7ff). Evidently Ahab wanted this to be a permanent transaction.

- 4] And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread.

Again Ahab returned home sullen and angry (cf. 1 Kgs 20:43). Ahab behaved in a childish manner. Rather than accepting Naboth's decision, Ahab lay on his bed sulking and even refused to eat.

- 5] But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread?
6] And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee *another* vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard.
7] And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, *and* eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.

“Relax. I'll handle it.”

Jezebel's Inquisition

- 8] So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed *them* with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that *were* in his city, dwelling with Naboth.
9] And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people:

A technical phrase meaning to bring him to trial. The verdict was predetermined. This was a mock trial with a mere semblance of justice. That it might appear, however, in the sight of the people as a legal trial, two witnesses were produced, as provided for by the Law (Deut 17:6, 7); but they were false. The technical accusation was not merely that Naboth had opposed the king, but that he had blasphemed the Divine name, a sin of which Jezebel herself was notoriously guilty.

- 10] And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And *then* carry him out, and stone him, that he may die.

Knowing how to use the laws of Israel to gain her ends, Jezebel sent letters to leaders in Naboth's town, asking them to declare a fast and to have two scoundrels accuse Naboth of cursing God and Ahab so that the people would stone Naboth. Cursing God was a crime punishable by stoning (Lev 24:16; Jn 10:33). At least two witnesses were required to condemn a person in Israel (Deut 17:6-7).

- 11] And the men of his city, *even* the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants in his city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them, *and* as it *was* written in the letters which she had sent unto them.

The leading men of Jezreel obviously feared Jezebel more than they feared the Lord because they carried out her orders exactly. There are always men ready to sell their testimony for money and to alter it to suit the evil purposes of the one who hires them. Compare the witnesses at the trial of Jesus (Mt 26:60, 61).

- 12] They proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people.
13] And there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him: and the men of Belial witnessed against him, *even* against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died.
14] Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth is stoned, and is dead.

When Naboth—and his sons (cf. 2 Kgs 9:26)—were dead the scoundrels dutifully reported that the job was done. After the victim had succumbed, it was customary to raise a pile of stones over his grave as a testimony to the manner of his death and the reason for it.

- 15] And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead.
16] And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

Jezebel then announced to Ahab that he could take possession of Naboth's vineyard because its former owner was now dead. The king got up from his bed and went down to take possession of this property he coveted. [Do you see a future parallel to this procedure in church history?]

- 17] And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,
18] Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which *is* in Samaria: behold, *he is*

in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it.

- 19] And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.

God told Elijah just what to say. Jezebel was directly responsible for Naboth's death but Ahab was ultimately responsible since Jezebel's letter to the elders ordering Naboth's murder had been sent out over Ahab's name (v. 8). Elijah said Ahab had committed the crime of seizing property not his own as well as killing Naboth. The place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood was in Jezreel. Dogs licking up one's blood was a disgraceful death, especially for a king whose body would normally be carefully guarded and buried with great respect. Elijah left no doubt in Ahab's mind concerning whose blood he referred to: "yes, yours!"

- 20] And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found *thee*: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD.

This suggests that Ahab may have concluded that it would be only a matter of time till Elijah or some other man of God hunted him down. Elijah was not now the "troubler of Israel" (18:17), but the king's "enemy." Ahab had made himself the enemy of the Lord and His people by doing evil in the eyes of the LORD (cf. 21:25). When Elijah said the king had sold himself, he meant the king had sacrificed his principles to obtain what he wanted, which included a comparatively worthless vineyard.

- 21] Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel,

The curse pronounced against Ahab is identical with that uttered against the house of Jeroboam and against Baasha (14:10, 11; 16:3, 4). [Remember that God has said, Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Gal 6:7).] If you and I could speak with men from the past—whether they were God's men or Satan's—they would tell us that this is an immutable law of God; it cannot be changed:

- Jacob found out the truth of this law.
- Pharaoh of Egypt, who killed the little Hebrew boys, thought he got by with his crime, but one day he found that *his* firstborn was dead.
- David committed an awful sin, but he did not get by with it. The same thing he did came back to him.
- Saul of Tarsus was a leader in the stoning of Stephen, but there came

a day in Asia Minor, at Antioch of Pisidia, when he was stoned and left for dead. The fact of the matter is that he was dead, and God raised him from the dead.]

Now here is the judgment that is pronounced on Ahab and Jezebel:

- 22] And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked *me* to anger, and made Israel to sin.

God promised to bring disaster on Ahab personally and to consume his descendants, cutting off from him every male in Israel. He would have to stand alone without allies (cf. 14:10; 16:3). Ahab's dynasty would be cut off as Jeroboam's and Baasha's had been (cf. 2 Kgs 9:9).

- 23] And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.

As for Jezebel dogs would eat her by the wall of Jezreel, hardly a fitting end for a powerful queen (cf. 2 Kgs 9:10, 36-37). Wild dogs lived off the garbage in cities such as Jezreel.

- 24] Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat.
25] But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.

The writer at this point inserted his own evaluation of Ahab and Jezebel into the narrative of Elijah and Ahab's conversation. Ahab was unique in his wickedness. He sold himself to do evil in the Lord's eyes (cf. v. 20). Jezebel, being void of any spiritual sensitivity and conscience, urged him on in evil.

- 26] And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all *things* as did the Amorites, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel.

In pursuing idolatry Ahab behaved in the vilest manner by following the sinful ways of the Amorites whom God had driven out of Palestine when the Israelites entered the land in Joshua's day (Josh 10:12-13).

- 27] And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly.

Elijah's predicted judgment crushed Ahab. In sincere repentance he humbled himself before the LORD. Tearing one's clothes (Esth 4:1; Job 1:20), wearing sackcloth (Gen 37:34; 1 Kgs 20:31-32; Esth 4:1; Neh 9:1; Dan 9:3), and fasting (Neh 9:1; Dan 9:3) all manifested a spirit of grief and contrition.

- 28] And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,
29] Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: *but* in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house.

God noticed Ahab's change of mind and behavior. Ahab's life was deep-dyed with sin, but in response to his self-humbling, God showed him some mercy. The destruction to come on Ahab's house would not be carried out in his own days but in those of his son Joram (2 Kgs 9:24-26; 10:17). Jezebel, however, did not repent. She suffered all that God promised she would without mercy (2 Kgs 9:30-37).

The incident of Naboth's Vineyard is a vivid picture of the medieval church for a thousand-year period, including the Dark Ages. Cf. Revelation 2:18-29. First promise of the Great Tribulation (unless...), cf. 2:25. It's implied that if they repent, they won't be in the Tribulation. Only the unrepentant church will go... Jezebel is finally destroyed (2 Kgs 9:10, 22, 30-37); cf. woman devoured, (Rev 17:16).

1 Kings 22

- 1] And they continued three years without war between Syria and Israel.
2] And it came to pass in the third year, that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel.

For three years after the battle of Aphek (cf. 1 Kgs 20:26-34) there was no war between the Israelites and the Arameans. However, in the third year (853 B.C.), shortly after Ahab and Ben-Hadad had fought Shalmaneser at the Battle of Qarqar, Ahab decided that he needed to retake the important city of Ramoth in Gilead from the Arameans who had taken it from Israel earlier.

- 3] And the king of Israel said unto his servants, Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead *is* ours, and we *be* still, *and* take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria?
4] And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramothgilead? And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I *am* as thou *art*, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses.

Jehoshaphat agreed for political reasons though he should not have done so for spiritual reasons; he was a godly king, faithful to the Lord. What has happened that would cause a good king like Jehoshaphat to make an alliance with a king as wicked as Ahab? Why would he fraternize with his natural enemy? It's an abnormal alliance, an unnatural confederacy. At this point it seems strange, but we will find out later that Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, had married Athaliah, the daughter of

Ahab and Jezebel. This was a case of a boy with a godly heritage married a girl with a very wicked one. And the wicked influence prevailed. When the believer and the unbeliever get married, my friend, you can always be sure that the believer is going to have trouble. "When you marry a child of the devil, your father-in-law sees to it that you have trouble."

- 5] And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD to day.
6] Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramothgilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver *it* into the hand of the king.

But to satisfy Jehoshaphat, Ahab called for the prophets, about 400 of them. These were evidently prophets of the Lord (not to be confused with the 400 prophets of Baal Elijah had already slain); Baal prophets would have been unacceptable to Jehoshaphat. But they were apostate prophets. They had no concern about obtaining and relating the true word of the Lord. Their desire was to give their king the kind of advice they thought he wanted to hear. This would please him and he would favor them.

- 7] And Jehoshaphat said, *Is there* not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might enquire of him?

Their answer to Ahab's question somehow led Jehoshaphat to believe that they did not have the mind of the Lord. So he requested a prophet true to the LORD of whom they could inquire (cf. 2 Kgs 3:11).

- 8] And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, *There is* yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may enquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so.

Ahab replied that there was one man of God remaining whom they could contact. However, that one always prophesied evil for Ahab and for that reason Ahab said he hated him. Obviously Ahab was more concerned about feeling good than he was about knowing the truth. Micaiah is the longer form of *Micah* (not to be confused with the prophet in Isaiah's day whose book bears his name). Micaiah, like Elijah, was one of the comparatively few faithful prophets in Israel in that day. [Josephus and the rabbinical scholars have imagined that Micaiah was the unnamed prophet who had condemned Ahab for setting Benhadad free (20:35ff.).] Ahab himself declared that he hated Micaiah because the prophet never prophesied good of him but always evil. Urged on by Jehoshaphat's continuing interest in hearing from Micaiah, Ahab sent for him.

- 9] Then the king of Israel called an officer, and said, Hasten *hither* Micaiah the son of Imlah.
- 10] And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah sat each on his throne, having put on their robes, in a void place in the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them.

Perhaps Micaiah lived in or near Samaria where this conversation took place. The threshing floor was usually an elevated area; it would have been a good place for Ahab and Jehoshaphat to prepare themselves for battle. The gate of the city was the most popular place to assemble, so a large crowd was gathered including the 400 prophets. Before Micaiah arrived there was a very interesting interlude. Another false prophet, Zedekiah, the son of Chenaanah, stepped forward to make his prophecy:

- 11] And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made him horns of iron: and he said, Thus saith the LORD, With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them.

One of these prophets, Zedekiah (cf. v. 24), had even fashioned some horns out of iron and claimed blasphemously that God had told him that the two allied kings with the horns would gore the Arameans to destruction.

- 12] And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramothgilead, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver *it* into the king's hand.
- 13] And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets *declare* good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak *that which is* good.
- 14] And Micaiah said, *As* the LORD liveth, what the LORD saith unto me, that will I speak.

But Micaiah told him that he would utter whatever words the LORD gave him regardless of what others might say. Like Elijah, Micaiah was prepared to stand alone. [Martin Luther would echo this attitude...]

- 15] So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramothgilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver *it* into the hand of the king.

The king, Ahab as the host, asked Micaiah the same question he had asked the other prophets (v. 6). Micaiah's tone of voice and his manner doubtless betrayed the fact that he was speaking in irony—that he meant just the reverse of what he said.

- 16] And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but *that which is* true in the name of the LORD?

Ahab recognized at once what Micaiah was doing: His own reply was equally sarcastic. He had probably never told Micaiah to swear to tell

him nothing but the truth before, as he did not need to. But Ahab's saying that probably sounded good.

- 17] And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace.

The time for sarcasm was over. Micaiah related the burden of the Lord in all its devastating simplicity and force. Micaiah said he had seen, perhaps in a vision, all Israel scattered over the hills of Gilead like sheep without a shepherd, wandering and in need of leadership. The LORD had told the prophet that these sheep had no master, obviously a reference to Ahab. After the shepherd would be killed in battle the sheep would return home without being pursued by the enemy, Aram.

- 18] And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?

Ahab reacted to this sober warning offhandedly (v. 18; cf. v. 8), unwilling to consider with due gravity.

- 19] And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left.

Micaiah proceeded to explain the rest of what God had shown him, not about the battle but about the advice both kings had been receiving from the 400 prophets. Micaiah saw the host of heaven, the angelic armies of God, assembled around God's heavenly throne. [Some scholars assume that this may have simply been a revelation given in anthropomorphic terms to help Micaiah and his audience visualize what was taking place on the threshing floor before them.]

- 20] And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramothgilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner.
- 21] And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him.
- 22] And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade *him*, and prevail also: go forth, and do so.
- 23] Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee.

The point was clear to all: The 400 prophets spoke with a lying spirit to deceive, and to lead Ahab to disaster in battle and to his death (v. 20). The Lord had apparently permitted a "lying spirit" (i.e., a demon) to speak

through the 400 prophets as a means of bringing Ahab to his death. Let it be remembered that Ahab had had ample chance to know truth through Elijah, but had stubbornly resisted it.

- 24] But Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah went near, and smote Micaiah on the cheek, and said, Which way went the Spirit of the LORD from me to speak unto thee?

Zedekiah (cf. v. 11) certainly understood Micaiah's message as did everyone else. A slap in the face was a great insult (cf. Job 16:10; Lam 3:30; Micah 5:1), greater then than it is today. The false prophet brazenly or innocently claimed that he had not invented his prophecy himself but that it had been given to him by the Lord.

- 25] And Micaiah said, Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself.

Micaiah did not need to argue about whose prophecy had come from the LORD and whose had come from the lying spirit; time would tell. He was not trying to scare people when there was no real cause for fear. Zedekiah would find out who had the true word from the Lord when he fled to hide in an inner room (i.e., after Ahab had been killed the false prophets would flee in terror).

- 26] And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son;

Ahab's reaction evidences the blindness and folly that overtakes those who disregard the Word of the Lord. Rather than repenting, as he had done previously (21:27), now hardened in sin to the point of insensibility, Ahab ordered that Micaiah be given to Amon, the city mayor, and to Joash, the king's son. ("King's son" is apparently a title of a royal official and is not to be taken as the literal son of Ahab (cf. 2 Chr 28:7; Jer 36:26; 38:6).)

- 27] And say, Thus saith the king, Put this *fellow* in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace.

- 28] And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the LORD hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you.

Micaiah had the final word, however, and it was another gracious but strong warning for Ahab, indicating that the king would not return from battle safely. The prophet also called on all present to remember his words for they would prove that the LORD had spoken through him when his prophecy came to pass.

- 29] So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramothgilead.

- 30] And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and enter into the battle; but put thou on thy robes. And the king of Israel disguised himself, and went into the battle.

Despite Micaiah's warning Ahab, the king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, his ally, went up to Ramoth Gilead to face Ben-Hadad II, the king of Aram. Despite his bold front, Ahab secretly feared that Micaiah was telling the truth. He, therefore, suggested that Jehoshaphat should dress in his regal robes (perhaps a special uniform), but that he himself should dress like an ordinary soldier. The good Jehoshaphat did not perceive that he was being involved in trickery—trickery that nearly cost him his life.

- 31] But the king of Syria commanded his thirty and two captains that had rule over his chariots, saying, Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel.

Ahab did not know that he had become the personal target of Benhadad and his men. The king of Syria, it seems, did not care if everyone else escaped uninjured so long as he could have the king of Israel slain. In view of the fact that Ahab had recently spared Ben-hadad's life, this was gross ingratitude. Perhaps Ben-hadad justified his conduct on the ground that Ahab was a violator of the peace treaty, for Ahab had renewed the war.

- 32] And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, Surely it *is* the king of Israel. And they turned aside to fight against him: and Jehoshaphat cried out.

Dressed in his royal attire Jehoshaphat became the target of the whole Aramean army. Under attack he cried out something that told the Arameans he was not the man they sought. Perhaps he cried out to God as well as to the soldiers since he trusted in and prayed to the Lord.

- 33] And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots perceived that it *was* not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him.

- 34] And a *certain* man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded.

The Hebrew for "at a venture" means *in his simplicity*, i.e., without taking specific aim. The mathematical probability that the arrow would find its right target was extremely low. Yet directed by the judgment of the Lord, it found its mark. [J. Vernon McGee called it "the first guided missile."] The manner in which Ahab was fatally wounded is one of many examples in Scripture of God using an incident that would have been regarded as accidental to accomplish His purpose. Ahab was injured by an arrow shot at random. The man who shot the arrow did not knowingly aim it at the chink in the king's armor, but God directed him and guided the fatal missile to its mark (Prov 16:33).

- 35] And the battle increased that day: and the king was stayed up in his chariot

against the Syrians, and died at even: and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot.

The king's chariot was large enough to accommodate Ahab as he sat propped up in it to watch the battle until sunset. The reference to Ahab's blood running down onto the floor of his chariot sets the stage for the later word about the fulfillment of the prophecy of Ahab's death (v. 38).

36] And there went a proclamation throughout the host about the going down of the sun, saying, Every man to his city, and every man to his own country.

The battle broke up when Ahab died; Ben-Hadad had achieved his objective as the Israelites could not take Ramoth Gilead.

37] So the king died, and was brought to Samaria; and they buried the king in Samaria.

The body of Ahab was returned to Samaria where he was buried. Had he not repented earlier (21:27) Ahab would not have been buried at all (21:28-29).

38] And *one* washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armour; according unto the word of the LORD which he spake.

Ahab's chariot was then driven around to a pool (in the same place that Naboth died), where it was washed. Ahab was despised by God for his wickedness. [The clause "they washed his armor" presents a textual problem, since the Hebrew consonantal form can be translated *and the harlots washed themselves there*. Though it may be argued that the best reading is the former, let it be remembered that in the Mosaic law dogs and harlots are placed within the same category. The dogs came to lick up Ahab's blood; the harlots came to wash. Perhaps a double curse was thus enacted to show the extreme displeasure of God against a man who had so despised His Word.]

The story of Ahab concludes with his blood being desecrated in the company of Samaria's despised prostitutes and dogs. Ahab died as God had predicted he would (20:42; 21:19, 21).

39] Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory house which he made, and all the cities that he built, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

40] So Ahab slept with his fathers; and Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead.

In excavating Samaria archeologists discovered more than 200 ivory figures, panels, and plaques in one storeroom. Ahab used large quantities of ivory to beautify his palace in various ways. He also fortified several cities in Israel. In addition to the projects just mentioned, Ahab

ruled capably in spite of the gross spiritual apostasy that characterized his administration. He was generally successful militarily because of his own native ability and God's mercy on Israel. His alliance with Judah under Jehoshaphat began the first real period of peace between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms since the monarchy had split and it lasted about 30 years until the reign of Jehu began in 841. But in spite of Ahab's other accomplishments his building a Baal altar and temple and encouraging Baal worship (16:32-33) weakened Israel as never before.

Jehoshaphat's Reign in Judah

41] And Jehoshaphat the son of Asa began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel.

42] Jehoshaphat *was* thirty and five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name *was* Azubah the daughter of Shilhi.

Asa's son, Jehoshaphat, began his reign in Judah in 873 B.C. as coregent with his father. This coregency existed because of Asa's poor health (15:23) and it continued for three years until Asa's death in 870 B.C. when Jehoshaphat became sole ruler. This was the first instance of coregency since Solomon had ruled jointly with David for a brief time. Jehoshaphat was king for 25 years altogether (873-848 B.C.). He was one of Judah's eight good kings and one of its four reformers like his father Asa.

43] And he walked in all the ways of Asa his father; he turned not aside from it, doing *that which was* right in the eyes of the LORD: nevertheless the high places were not taken away; *for* the people offered and burnt incense yet in the high places.

According to 2 Chronicles 17:6 Jehoshaphat removed the high places, but 1 Kings 22:43 and 2 Chronicles 20:33 indicate that he did not remove them. Apparently he did, but when the people restored them he did not again obliterate the restored high places. Other kings of Judah who did not remove the high places were Joash (2 Kgs 12:3), Amaziah (2 Kgs 14:4), Azariah (2 Kgs 15:4), and Jotham (2 Kgs 15:35). Ahaz sacrificed at the high places (2 Kgs 16:4), perhaps ones he restored. Those were then removed by Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:4), rebuilt by Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:3), and demolished again by Josiah (2 Kgs 23:8, 13, 15, 19).

44] And Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel.

As mentioned previously (cf. comments on 1 Kgs 22:39-40), Jehoshaphat and Ahab united in a treaty which resulted in peace between Judah and Israel during his reign. This was a mistake also—he should not have done this. Unfortunately this treaty involved the marriage of

Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram to Ahab's daughter Athaliah who followed Jezebel's example and caused Judah problems later (cf. 2 Kgs 11).

- 45] Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, and his might that he shewed, and how he warred, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?
- 46] And the remnant of the sodomites, which remained in the days of his father Asa, he took out of the land.

Jehoshaphat's achievements and attitudes are more fully expounded in 2 Chr 17-20. These included ordering the teaching of the Law of Moses throughout Judah. God miraculously delivered Judah from the united armies of Moab, Ammon, and Edom in response to the king's prayers and his obedience to the Lord. He was a strong ruler whose favor Philistia and Arabia courted. Jehoshaphat instituted many judicial reforms in Judah also. The writer of Kings noted his purge of the remaining male shrine prostitutes (cf. 1 Kgs 14:24; 15:12) in particular.

- 47] *There was* then no king in Edom: a deputy *was* king.
- 48] Jehoshaphat made ships of Tharshish to go to Ophir for gold: but they went not; for the ships were broken at Eziongeber.

As a result of the unstable political situation in Edom in his day (cf. v.47) Jehoshaphat was able to build a fleet of trading ships at Ezion Geber on the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba with Israel's king Ahaziah, Ahab's eldest son (cf. 2 Chr 20:36). The plan was to bring back gold from Ophir, in southwestern Arabia (cf. 1 Kgs 9:28; 10:11) as Solomon had done. But in some way the fleet was wrecked and never fulfilled its mission.

- 49] Then said Ahaziah the son of Ahab unto Jehoshaphat, Let my servants go with thy servants in the ships. But Jehoshaphat would not.
- 50] And Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father: and Jehoram his son reigned in his stead.

Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram began reigning as coregent with his father in 853 B.C. When Jehoshaphat died in 848 B.C., Jehoram reigned until 841.

- 51] Ahaziah the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned two years over Israel.

Ahaziah of Israel began his reign of two official years (one actual year) in 853 B.C. and he ruled until 852, during Jehoshaphat's reign in Judah.

- 52] And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

Ahaziah was the elder son of Ahab. His mother was Jezebel. Since

Ahaziah had no son his brother Joram (also called Jehoram) succeeded him when he died. Ahaziah followed his parents' evil ways and those of Jeroboam. Baal worship continued in Israel under his protection and encouragement.

- 53] For he served Baal, and worshipped him, and provoked to anger the LORD God of Israel, according to all that his father had done.

A short summary of Ahaziah's reign concludes 1 Kings, but the events of his rule follow in 2 Kings.

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) Summarize the relationships between Aram and the Northern Kingdom.
- 2) Why did God give Ahab victory over the Syrians?
- 3) Explain the prophet's parable in 1 Kings 20:35-42.
- 4) Explain how Naboth's vineyard relates to the allusion in Rev 2:20-24.
- 5) What was revealing about Ahab's dressing Jehoshaphat in regal robes in the battle against the Syrians?

Discussion Questions

(“Where two people agree, one is redundant.”)

- 1) What were Ahab's *positive* attributes? Contrast his “secular” report card with his spiritual one.
- 2) What are some of the most important lessons from the life of Ahab?
- 3) Jehoshaphat was one of the “good” kings of Judah. What were some of his mistakes (so far)?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Compare Jezebel with the Woman & the Leaven parable in Matthew 13. See also Lev 2; 1 Cor 5:7, 8.
- 2) Explore Destiny of Babylon: Isa 13, 14; Jer 50, 51; Rev 17, 18. Cf. Zech 5:5-11.
- 3) Explore the phrases: “Queen of Heaven.” A Babylonian concept: Jer 7:18; Jer 44:15-30. “Deep things of Satan”: Esoteric mysteries of the Babylonian cults.

Preparation for Next Session:

Read 2 Kings.

2 Kings Session 1 2 Kings 1 - 3

In 1 Kings we had the record of the *division* of the kingdom and 2 Kings records the *collapse* of the kingdom. Considering the two books as a unit, they open with King David, and they close with the king of Babylon. They are the book of man's rule over God's kingdom—and the results were not good, of course. The moral teaching of these books is to show man his inability to rule himself and the world. In these four historical books we get a very graphic view of the rise and fall of the kingdom of Israel. The king and the prophet take the place of the priest as God's instruments of communication. 1 Kings 22:51 told us that "Ahaziah the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria...." We pick up the story in 2 Kings at this point. (The division seems to derive from the length of the scrolls, not a break in subject matter. Ahaziah's reign in Israel is begun in 1 Kings and concluded in 2 Kings.)

2 Kings 1

Fire from Heaven Protects Elijah from Ahaziah

Ahaziah's reign (853–852 B.C.), despite its brevity, was characterized by extreme iniquity. In 2 Kings, the first chapter, Ahaziah, king of Israel and son of Ahab and Jezebel, fell down through a lattice and seriously injured himself.

- 1] Then Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab.

Moab, under Mesha its king, rebelled against Israel after Ahab died. The death of the Israelite king encouraged Mesha to throw off the burden of taxation that Omri (Ahaziah's grandfather) had imposed when he had brought Moab under Israel's control (cf. comments on 1 Kgs 16:21-24). This rebellion was not effective at first but the fact that it began in Ahaziah's reign may suggest that Mesha considered Ahaziah a weaker king than Ahab.

- 2] And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that *was* in Samaria, and was sick: and he sent messengers, and said unto them, Go, enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease.

This verse begins a new incident in Ahaziah's life which occupies the remainder of chapter 1. The king had suffered an injury from falling through

the lattice covering of a window in his upper story room, probably to the ground below. His serious injury later proved fatal. The king's veneration of Baal can be seen in his sending messengers to Ekron, a Philistine city about 40 miles away, to inquire of a pagan idol whether he would recover.

Baal-Zebub: Baal-Zebub was one of the many local male fertility gods which bore some form of the name Baal (meaning "lord"). According to the Ugaritic alphabetic cuneiform tablets, this name is to be spelled *Baal-zebul*. Possibly the spelling was changed by some copyist to make the name ridiculous. The former means *Baal of the fly*. The latter means *Baal of the dwelling*, i.e., the Canaanite life-god, the chief Canaanite deity. Ahaziah had tried to syncretize Baal worship with the worship of Jehovah. Elijah here proves Baal to be powerless. Ahab on his part had broken the covenant by introducing Baal worship, substituting idolatry for the worship of the Lord. Ahaziah's request for an oracle was a challenge to the God of Israel.

Ahaziah sought some prophetic word of encouragement from the oracle of Baal-Zebub. His failure to inquire of Yahweh, the God of Israel, reveals the depth of his apostasy. Ahaziah's request for an oracle was a direct challenge to the Lord God of Israel. He wanted to know if he would recover from the effects of the accident.

- 3] But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, *Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron?*

The Angel of the LORD: generally viewed as the preincarnate Christ; (Gen 22:15, 16 makes the "angel of the Lord" and the Lord the same.). He appeared to Elijah as He had appeared to many other Old Testament leaders in the past. His appearances always identified an important revelation. The angel gave Elijah a prophecy to pass on to the king through the royal messengers whom Elijah intercepted as they traveled south from Samaria to Ekron. Though Ahaziah sought a message from Baal-Zebub, he got an answer from the true and living God. Perhaps Ahaziah, like his father Ahab, did not want to inquire of a faithful prophet of the Lord since those prophets were consistently opposing rather than supporting the king because of his wickedness. God's punishment for consulting a pagan idol rather than Himself was that Ahaziah would fail to recover from his injuries.

- 4] Now therefore thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. And Elijah departed.

This was one of Elijah's last missions. He went to meet the messengers and gave them this challenge: "Is it not because there is not a God in

Israel, that ye go to enquire of Baal-zebub the God of Ekron?" Then he gave them God's unwelcome prognosis: Ahaziah would not recover; he would die. An adverse oracle indicated that open sin and deliberate defection from God must end in death. The messengers went back and reported to the king what Elijah had said.

- 5] And when the messengers turned back unto him, he said unto them, Why are ye now turned back?
- 6] And they said unto him, There came a man up to meet us, and said unto us, Go, turn again unto the king that sent you, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD, *Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that thou sendest to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron?* therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.
- 7] And he said unto them, What manner of man *was he* which came up to meet you, and told you these words?
- 8] And they answered him, *He was* an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. And he said, *It is* Elijah the Tishbite.

The hairy garment (probably made from goats' dark hair) and large leather belt were part of the dress of prophets at that time. Cloth woven from hair, as rough as burlap, was sometimes called sackcloth. Since sackcloth symbolized distress or self-affliction (cf. 6:30; Gen 37:34; 2 Sam 3:31), Elijah's garb probably visualized the repentance to which the prophets called the people (cf. penitence and sackcloth in Neh 9:1; Jer 6:26). Ahaziah knew who Elijah was, of course, since Elijah had consistently opposed his parents, Ahab and Jezebel, for their Baal worship.

- 9] Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him: and, behold, he sat on the top of an hill. And he spake unto him, Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down.

To many this story seems like an unnecessarily cruel demonstration of God's power; However, the issues at stake justified severe action. Ahaziah showed complete contempt for Elijah and the God he represented by sending a band of soldiers to arrest the prophet like an outlaw and drag him before the throne. [Perhaps Elijah's position on the top of a hill should have reminded the captain of Elijah's victory over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18:20-40) and of his great God-given power. Either the captain did not make this connection or decided to disregard it.]

He acknowledged that Elijah was a man of God (cf. 2 Kgs 1:11), but ordered him to come down to him in Ahaziah's name. In 1 and 2 Kings the term "man of God" is a synonym for a prophet. It is used of Shemaiah (1 Kgs 12:22), of Elijah seven times (1 Kgs 17:18, 24; 2 Kgs 1:9, 10-13), of Elisha more than two dozen times in 2 Kings (the first occurrence is in 4:7 and the last is in

13:19), and of two other anonymous prophets (one is mentioned frequently in 1 Kgs 13 and in 2 Kgs 23:16-17; the other is referred to in 1 Kgs 20:28).

- 10] And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I *be* a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.

Remember: Ahaziah the king was the son of Jezebel, the woman who had tried to kill Elijah; Apparently there was still a price on his head. Elijah managed to communicate rather than compromise. The king sent another captain with fifty men, and he also ordered Elijah to come down from the top of the hill. What came down was fire from heaven which consumed the captain and his men.

Elijah's repetition of the fact that he was indeed a man of God (cf. v. 12) shows that this was an important issue; God's reputation was at stake. Was Ahaziah in charge, able to command God's servants to obey *him*? Or was God in charge, able to command Ahaziah's servants to obey *Him*? By sending fire from heaven (cf. v. 12) to consume the soldiers of the king, God was reminding Ahaziah that He was Israel's Ruler and that the king should submit to His sovereignty.

- 11] Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he answered and said unto him, O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly.
- 12] And Elijah answered and said unto them, If I *be* a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And the fire of God came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.

Ahaziah disregarded this tragedy and tried again to force Elijah to submit to him. This time the captain ordered the prophet, Come down (cf. v. 9) at once! Again Elijah reminded the captain, undoubtedly for the benefit of those looking on who would report the incident as well as for the officer, that he was indeed God's man. The fire of judgment fell again (cf. v. 10), proving that the first miracle was not just an accident but was the hand of God at work in judgment.

- 13] And he sent again a captain of the third fifty with his fifty. And the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and besought him, and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight.
- 14] Behold, there came fire down from heaven, and burnt up the two captains of the former fifties with their fifties: therefore let my life now be precious in thy sight.

Still Ahaziah hardened his heart. The third captain he sent had more respect for Yahweh and His representative than Ahaziah did. Rather than demanding surrender from a position of assumed superiority this

man submitted to Elijah's authority, falling to his knees before him. He too recognized Elijah as a man of God, but unlike the first two captains (cf. vv. 9, 11) he pleaded for mercy.

- 15] And the angel of the LORD said unto Elijah, Go down with him: be not afraid of him. And he arose, and went down with him unto the king.
- 16] And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast sent messengers to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron, *is it* not because *there is* no God in Israel to enquire of his word? therefore thou shalt not come down off that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.

This whole incident was designed to demonstrate God's sovereignty to the king and the people of Israel. Standing before the king, Elijah fearlessly delivered the message God had given him. Because of Ahaziah's failure to consult Israel's God (cf. v. 2) and his determination to lead independently, God would depose him. This is the same message Elijah had given earlier to the king's messengers on their way to Ekron (vv. 3-4).

- 17] So he died according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken. And Jehoram reigned in his stead in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah; because he had no son.

Just as Elijah had announced (vv. 4, 16), Ahaziah never recovered from his injuries and died shortly thereafter. Since Ahaziah had no son his brother Jehoram succeeded him as king of Israel. This accession took place in the second year of Jehoram king of Judah (i.e., the second year of his coregency with his father Jehoshaphat, viz., 852 B.C.). The kings of Israel and Judah at this time had the same name. (The NIV keeps the two kings distinct by spelling the king of Israel's name "Joram" and the king of Judah's "Jehoram.")

- 18] Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah which he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

This ends the line of Omri and Ahab.

2 Kings 2

The Translation of Elijah

This chapter brings us to the conclusion of Elijah's life. He is translated into heaven in a chariot of fire. Then Elisha comes into prominence. The chapter closes with the incident of irreverent hoodlums being attacked by bears.

- 1] And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.

Departing from Gilgal in Israel Elijah and his younger fellow prophet Elisha headed for Bethel on a mission from God. This Gilgal may be modern Jiljiliah (seven miles northwest of Bethel), different from the Gilgal near the Jordan River. [The Hebrew says *went down*. This Gilgal is higher than Bethel, and is in Ephraim near Shiloh, the modern Jiljilyeh. In Amos 4:4 and Hos 4:15 it is named, along with Bethel, as a seat of false worship of God.]

- 2] And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Bethel. And Elisha said *unto him*, *As* the LORD liveth, and *as* thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel.

In spite of the exhortation, Elisha declared that he would go with Elijah, who was now to visit the three schools of the prophets to strengthen them against inroads of Baal worship. The existence of these schools indicates that the prophets were organized into a type of guild. Elisha had learned somehow (perhaps from Elijah himself) that this would be Elijah's last day on earth. Determined to be with his father in the faith till the very end Elisha refused Elijah's suggestion that he remain comfortably in Gilgal. A dying person often pronounced blessings on others (cf. Gen 49) and Elisha did not want to miss out on this opportunity to receive God's blessings on his life and ministry.

- 3] And the sons of the prophets that *were* at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know *it*; hold ye your peace.

Some prophets of the LORD living at Bethel also knew of Elijah's departure and told Elisha. These groups or schools of the prophets had been established to teach the Israelites the revealed Word of God. Elijah was Elisha's master in the sense of his being the younger prophet's mentor. Elisha's response, "Do not speak of it," would seem to mean, "Do not add to my sorrow at this prospect by reminding me of it."

- 4] And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, *As* the LORD liveth, and *as* thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho.

Testing Elisha's commitment again, Elijah suggested that Elisha stay in Bethel rather than accompanying him to his next stop, Jericho. Elisha showed his zeal by refusing to leave Elijah. Elisha will not leave Elijah because he knows that Elijah is going to leave the earth that day. Elisha wants to be present when the Lord takes him home.

- 5] And the sons of the prophets that *were* at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he answered, Yea, I know *it*; hold ye your peace.

The interesting thing is that people, then as well as today, were turning to all kinds of people and places for information. This is the day when the fortunetellers and those who deal with the zodiac and the occult are handing out many suggestions. People are turning everywhere except to God. You won't get any information from these areas that you cannot get from God. The sons of the prophets had information that Elijah was going to leave, but Elisha already knew it. They could not tell him anything new.

- 6] And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the LORD hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, *As* the LORD liveth, and *as* thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on.
- 7] And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan.
- 8] And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped *it* together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground.

Elijah tested Elisha a third time, and Elisha again refused to put his own comfort ahead of the possibility of receiving a special blessing from God. So they went toward the Jordan River. As the day wore on 50 of the young prophets from Jericho, realizing that Elijah's departure was imminent, followed at a distance to observe what would happen to him. At the bank of the Jordan River Elijah rolled up his cloak and, using it as a symbol of God's power, struck the water with it.

A prophet's cloak symbolized his authority under God (cf. 1 Kgs 19:19) with which God clothed and empowered him. (cf. Moses' rod, Ex 17:9). Miraculously the water divided and the riverbed dried up so that the two men crossed over as the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea and the Jordan River. The Lord had parted the River Jordan for Joshua and the people of Israel at least five hundred years before this; now He repeats the miracle for Elijah and Elisha. (cf. Ex 14:16, 21-22). (This is one of many similarities between the ministries of Moses and Elijah.) Elisha was reminded that the same God with the same power was still alive and active in Israel.

- 9] And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.

Elijah then invited Elisha to ask what he wanted from him before he would be taken away. Elisha requested the blessing of the firstborn, a double portion. (cf. "double share of," Deut 21:17). But Elisha wanted spiritual rather than material blessing. He was not asking to be twice as popular as Elijah or to perform twice as many miracles. Elisha was asking to be the successor of Elijah and to be privileged to carry on his ministry under God

- 10] And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: *nevertheless*, if thou see me *when I am* taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be *so*. Now don't miss that. Elisha actually was a greater prophet than Elijah. He had a double portion of the Spirit of God upon him. [If you count the miracles of Elijah, there are 7; Elisha had 14.]

Elijah's Miracles:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Stops the rains | 1 Kings 17:1 |
| 2. Multiplies a widow's food | 1 Kings 17:14 |
| 3. Restores the widow's son to life | 1 Kings 17:21 |
| 4. Calls down fire on Mount Carmel | 1 Kings 18:38 |
| 5. Restores rain to the land. | 1 Kings 18:41 |
| 6. Calls down fire on soldiers. | 2 Kings 1:12 |
| 7. Divides waters of the Jordan. | 2 Kings 2:8 |

Elisha's Miracles:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Separating the Jordan waters, | 2 Kings 2:14; |
| 2. Healing spring waters, | 2 Kings 2:21; |
| 3. Cursing jeering young men, | 2 Kings 2:24; |
| 4. Filling ditches with water and winning a battle, | 2 Kings 3:15-26; |
| 5. Multiplying a widow's oil, | 2 Kings 4:1-7; |
| 6. Promising a pregnancy, | 2 Kings 4:14-17; |
| 7. Raising a Shunammite's son from the dead, | 2 Kings 4:32-37; |
| 8. Making poison harmless, | 2 Kings 4:38-41; |
| 9. Multiplying loaves, | 2 Kings 4:42-44; |
| 10. Healing Naaman the leper, | 2 Kings 5:1-19; |
| cursing Gehazi with leprosy, | 2 Kings 5:19, 27; |
| 11. Making an axhead float, | 2 Kings 6:1-6; |
| 12. Blinding and trapping an Aramean army, | 2 Kings 6:8-23; |
| 13. Showing his servant an angel army, | 2 Kings 6:15-17; |
| 14. Predicting an excess of food for besieged Samaria, | 2 Kings 6:24-7:20. |

However, this was not Elijah's to give; for that reason it was a difficult thing. Elijah did not know if God would grant Elisha's request. The sign that He would grant it would be Elisha's actually seeing Elijah being taken from him. This was not a condition for Elisha to receive the double portion but the evidence that he would.

- 11] And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, *there appeared* a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

Suddenly a fast-approaching chariot and horses of fire separated Elijah from Elisha. These did not bear Elijah into heaven; a whirlwind did that.

The fiery horses and chariot were symbols of God's power in battle. (cf. Isa 31:1; 34:8, 9; Ex 14:9, 17; 1 Kgs 10:29; Ps 104:3, 4). Elijah went up in the storm in the presence of the Lord, *not* in the chariot. See also Mal 4:5, 6; Mt 11:14. God was saying in this event that His power was far greater than any military might. It was this power that Elijah had demonstrated and which Elisha in his wisdom valued so highly (cf. Ex 14:9, 17; 1 Kgs 10:29; Ps 104:3-4; Isa 31:1). Like the pillar of cloud that led the Israelites in the wilderness (Ex 13:21), it represented God's presence. This is a spectacular conclusion of a spectacular life!

- 12] And Elisha saw *it*, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.

God swept Elijah off the face of the earth into His very presence. And Elisha did see the event. Elijah had been Elisha's spiritual father, his predecessor in the ministry of calling people back to God. Elisha's reference to the chariots and horsemen of Israel shows that he regarded Elijah as a powerful instrument whom God had used to wage war against the idolatry in Israel. He would be greatly missed. Elisha tore his own clothes as an act of mourning (cf. Gen 37:29, 34; 44:13; Josh 7:6; Esth 4:1; Job 1:20; 2:12) over the loss of this great spiritual warrior. From then on Elisha would wear Elijah's cloak and would serve with the authority and power it symbolized. [See the legend of this cloak at the end of this chapter.]

- 13] He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan;
- 14] And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where *is* the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over.

Elijah's cloak had fallen from him as he was taken up into heaven. Using it as Elijah had done, Elisha struck the water of the Jordan and the river parted again (cf. v. 8). This man Elisha is taking Elijah's place, and he demonstrates his faith. He takes Elijah's robe and smites the waters just as Elijah had done. *The power is not in the robe nor in Elijah; the power is in God*, and Elisha knows that. Elisha had the faith Elijah had, and it is faith in the *God* of Elijah. He asks the question, "Where is the LORD God of Elijah?"

This is the important question today. Instead of looking to men or women, methods or some nostrum for help, as many people do, why not look to the Lord God of Israel? He is the *living* God, He is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Elisha took Elijah's mantle, smote the waters, and they parted. He crossed over the river to begin a new phase in his life.

- 15] And when the sons of the prophets which *were* to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him.

Elijah was indeed gone, and there was no need to investigate. Elisha said, "I told you so!" The 50 prophets from Jericho (cf. v. 7), observing the whirlwind and the parting of the Jordan both times, concluded that Elijah's spiritual gifts had been passed on to Elisha. Out of respect for his special calling they bowed before him.

- 16] And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the LORD hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley. And he said, Ye shall not send.

The sons of the prophets (the theological students of that day) were still watching and they saw Elisha part the waters and return across the Jordan River. They doubted that Elijah had really gone up. They apparently suspected that the Lord had dumped him in some abandoned area. What a peculiar idea they had of God!

- 17] And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not.

They did not realize as Elisha did that Elijah had been taken into the presence of God and had not returned to the earth. So they requested permission to send out search parties to locate Elijah. They, like Obadiah, thought he might have been transported by the Spirit of the LORD (cf. 1 Kgs 18:12), perhaps to some remote mountain or valley. Knowing their search would be futile, Elisha tried to dissuade them. But they insisted and in order to avoid appearing heartless Elisha finally gave them permission.

- 18] And when they came again to him, (for he tarried at Jericho,) he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not?
- 19] And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city *is* pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water *is* naught, and the ground barren.

Then the men of the city of Jericho came to Elisha with a problem. The incident recorded in verses 19-22 evidently followed soon after the one in verses 15-18. Elisha was still in Jericho. Apparently word about him had spread for now all the citizens of the city knew of Elisha's power. The leading men came to him with a practical problem that gave him opportunity to demonstrate the Lord's desire and ability to bless the people. Jericho had many natural advantages since it was located in a fertile area of the Jordan Valley. But the water from a major spring had turned bad, perhaps brackish,

and when used for irrigation it killed the crops rather than nourishing them. The parallelism between this physical situation and the spiritually polluting influences of Baal worship in Israel is suggestive.

- 20] And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought *it* to him.
21] And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the LORD, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren *land*.
22] So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake.

Elisha's solution, given by the LORD, was also designed to *teach* the people as well as to relieve their immediate distress. The new bowl represented himself, the new instrument in God's hand. Salt was known by the Israelites to preserve and purify; it was used in each of their daily grain offerings to the Lord (cf. Lev 2:13). But adding salt to water normally makes water worse, not better. When the salt was put into the Jericho water the situation miraculously improved. This miracle showed the people of Jericho that the Lord, not Baal, the so-called god of fertility, could heal their barrenness. [Is your "salt" losing its savor?]

Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Lk 14:35; cf. Mt 5:13

God's permanent work on the spring would serve as a perpetual reminder of His ability to bring fruitfulness and blessing out of the barrenness and sterility caused by idolatry. This was Elisha's his *second* miracle. Today you can see those waters in the valley at Jericho.

How to Bear Hecklers

Next followed an incident which has been criticized as much as anything in the Scriptures. This incident is pointed out with glee by the enemies of the Word of God who bemoan the brutal slaying of these poor little children.

First, let's look at the background. Elisha was returning from Elijah's translation when this event took place. The word had gone before him concerning what had taken place. As he went up to Beth-el, "little children" mocked him. Elisha cursed them in the name of the Lord, and two female bears came out of the woods and "tare forty and two children." Not only the critics but also many sincere believers have been stumped by this portion of Scripture. The scorner says, "You don't mean to tell me that God would destroy little children like that?" What is

recorded here seems to contradict other portions of Scripture. Now Elijah was succeeded by Elisha. In many respects Elisha was greater than Elijah. This will undoubtedly be a surprise to many people who consider Elijah one of the greatest prophets, and possibly one of the witnesses who will one day return to earth during the tribulation (Rev. 11:3-7). If you want to measure these two men by the miracles they performed, Elisha performed the most miracles: 14 vs. Elijah's 7.

Elijah was the man for the public. Elisha was the one who ministered personally to individuals. Because his ministry was largely in this area, it was not quite as exciting and dramatic as Elijah's ministry. He was a gentle man in contrast to Elijah. Elisha was a young man at the beginning of his ministry. On this occasion he was returning from beyond Jordan where Elijah had been caught up in a chariot of fire and taken to heaven. News of this event had spread like wildfire over the countryside. Many people knew about it as Elisha returned to Beth-el. *Beth-el* means "house of God." It was first mentioned by Abraham, then by Jacob. Beth-el, however, did not continue to live up to its name. At the time of the division of the kingdom, Jeroboam, you will recall, placed one of the golden calves in Beth-el for the people to worship so that they would not continue to go to Jerusalem to worship. There was also a school for false prophets at Beth-el. It was, of course, an imitation of the school of prophets in Judah. It was in this atmosphere that the children of Beth-el were educated. They were godless. They had no training. They had no discipline at home. Beth-el was a great deal like Los Angeles: which, ironically, means "the city of angels," and where they have everything else but angels here. Now Elisha is on his way to Beth-el.

- 23] And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head.

The epithet baldhead may have been a form of scorn, for baldness was undesirable (cf. Isa 3:17, 24). Since it was customary for men to cover their heads, the young men probably could not tell if Elisha was bald or not. They regarded God's prophet with contempt.

"Little children" is נַחֲרָי *na'ar* or *nahar* in Hebrew. It is used of Isaac when he was 28, of Joseph when he was 39, also for the Sodomites who attacked the home of Lot. You will find it used in other places in Scripture, and it does not refer to little children as we think of them. When Samuel came to anoint as king one of the sons of Jesse, you will remember that his sons were grown. As they passed by Samuel one by one, he said to Jesse, "Are these all thy children?" Well, the word *children* is the same word used in 2 Kings 2:23. It is used to describe Jesse's grown sons. The

youngest son, David, was not even there. Both Solomon (1 Kgs 3:7) and Jeremiah (Jer 1:6, 7) are called *na'ar* (sing.) These were young people, morally responsible. For example, 1 Kings 12:8 says,

But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him.

This verse is speaking about the time Rehoboam forsook the wisdom of the older men, the wise men, and consulted with the younger men who had grown up with him. Rehoboam was not consulting with little juniors, or gone to nursery school and talked things over with the little ones. They were young men.

The hoodlums who were taunting Elisha were young men, not little children. You will find this word used in many places in Scripture, and in every other place it is translated “young men.” This was a crowd of young fellows. They were students of the false prophets. They were a gang that mocked and ridiculed Elisha. They said, “*Go up, thou bald head.*” What did they mean by that? They were telling him to do the same thing Elijah had done. They were saying, “Why don’t you take off like Elijah did?” Their jeering, recorded in the slang of their day, implied that if Elisha were a great prophet of the Lord, as Elijah was, he should go on up into heaven as Elijah reportedly had done. They were ridiculing the truth in Scripture that God will take a people out of this world: This is the same attitude, Peter says, that will appear on the earth again in the last days. This incident in 2 Kings is given to us to let us know that God intends to judge those who ridicule the second coming of Christ. 2 Peter 3:3-4 says:

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

During the last days on earth there will be those who will ridicule believers about the coming of Christ. 2 Kings is a picture of the judgment that will come upon those who will ridicule Christ’s return to earth. It is a fearful judgment.

24] And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.

He pronounced a curse upon them. There is a great deal about judgment in the Word of God. Elisha sounds like Elijah here. [He also sounds like the Lord Jesus Christ who said, “Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee,

Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.” (Mt 11:21) He went on to say, “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell...” (Mt 11:23).]

Elisha then called down a curse on the villains. This cursing stemmed not from Elisha’s pride but from their disrespect for the LORD as reflected in their treatment of His spokesman (cf. 1:9-14). The size of the group suggests that the taunting was prearranged. Again God used wild animals to execute His judgment (cf., e.g., 1 Kgs 13:24). That 42 men were mauled by the two bears suggests that a mass demonstration had been organized against God and Elisha. After the bears did their work, nobody else around Beth-el ridiculed Elisha. [As Jon Courson might suggest, this is the way to “bear” hecklers!] It is interesting that eight apparently survived; the same number as survived in Noah’s ark.

25] And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria.

Elisha journeyed on from Bethel to Mount Carmel. There among other activities he undoubtedly reviewed God’s mighty vindication of Himself through his mentor, Elijah (1 Kgs 18:19-46). Elisha’s ministry would continue what Elijah had begun (1 Kgs 19:16). From Mount Carmel Elisha returned to Samaria. This city, capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, was to be the site of many of Elisha’s mighty deeds. These early miracles in Elisha’s ministry identified him as a unique spokesman for God with the authority and power of Elijah, one worthy of the greatest respect as a representative of the living God.

(Tradition): The Legend of Elijah’s Mantle

Mystery: Why walk 20 miles to hear John the Baptist? (The Temple authorities in Jerusalem had to send an inquiry team! (Jn 1:19) When Elisha dies, mantle placed in the compartment of the Altar of Incense. When Zechariah receives annunciation of John the Baptist, he is instructed to remove the mantle; and this is literally worn by John 30 years later (Cf. Luke 1:5-17) [“...And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah”]

[Feasibility: The presence of the Altar of Incense in the 2nd Temple? Note: Both Moses death and Elijah’s departure in the probable region of the Mount of Transfiguration...]

2 Kings 3

Miracles of Elisha

Review

Elisha was farming when Elijah came to him. He was working a rich man's fields, plowing with the twelfth of 12 pair of oxen. Elijah threw his coat around Elisha, claiming him for his service, and walked on. Elisha was ready to follow, but begged permission to say good-bye to his parents. Later Elisha killed the oxen he had been working with, and cooked them by burning his farm equipment. Literally "burning his bridges behind him," Elisha became Elijah's attendant and later, his successor.

During the years of Elisha, Israel was constantly threatened by a powerful Syria, led first by Ben-Hadad and later by Hazael. Ahab was dead, but members of his family still ruled, and like their father followed wicked ways. Elisha lived to command the anointing of Jehu as king of Israel. Jehu destroyed not only Ahab's family but also wiped out Baal worship in Israel. The stories of Elisha give us insight into this critical period of Old Testament history, and help us to see God as One who remains involved in the lives of ordinary people even when the nation has strayed far from His ways.

- 1] Now Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years.

Jehoram was the 2nd son of Ahab and Jezebel and successor of his brother Ahaziah, who died without having any children. In the 18th year after Jehoshaphat began reigning as sole king of Judah, Jehoram became king over Israel and reigned 12 years (852-841 B.C.).

- 2] And he wrought evil in the sight of the LORD; but not like his father, and like his mother: for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made.

Though Jehoram did get rid of this idol he remained sympathetic to and supportive of Baal worship in Israel (cf. 10:19-28).

- 3] Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom.

Though wicked, he was less evil than his father Ahab and his mother Jezebel, but he did cleave "unto the sins of Jeroboam" which was calf-worship.

Elisha's Ministry (3:4 - 8:15)

The great ministry of Elisha, already begun and revealed in part, is now recorded in this large section of stories.

- 4] And Mesha king of Moab was a sheepmaster, and rendered unto the king of Israel an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool.

The Moabites raised sheep. When Omri subjugated Moab he imposed a tribute of lambs & wool which the Moabites grudgingly provided for years.

- 5] But it came to pass, when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.

When Ahab died in battle, Mesha the Moabite king rebelled against King Ahaziah (1:1). Mesha considered Israel weakened enough, after Ahab's death, for Moab to attempt to gain her freedom. (See 2 Chr 20 for a previous Moabite invasion of Judah, when the Moabites were destroyed, and Moab was left too weak to repel the alliance. This rebellion seems to have been ineffective since Mesha also rebelled against Ahaziah's successor, Jehoram (3:4-27).) Jehoram, therefore, gathered his troops together and made an alliance with Jehoshaphat to join forces with him to bring Moab back into subjection.

- 6] And king Jehoram went out of Samaria the same time, and numbered all Israel.
7] And he went and sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, The king of Moab hath rebelled against me: wilt thou go with me against Moab to battle? And he said, I will go up: I *am* as thou *art*, my people as thy people, *and* my horses as thy horses.

The fact that Jehoram sought an alliance with Jehoshaphat indicates that he needed to cross Judean territory in order to advance against Moab. This in turn indicates that Mesha had strengthened his northern border. If Jehoram could gain Jehoshaphat, he would also gain Edom, which was now under Judah. Jehoshaphat forgot that alliances with those who sin against the Lord are forbidden to believers.

- 8] And he said, Which way shall we go up? And he answered, The way through the wilderness of Edom.

Jehoram suggested attacking from the south through the Desert of Edom rather than from the north, the more normal though heavily defended frontier. The route chosen by Jehoshaphat passed along the west side of the Dead Sea and around its southern end.

- 9] So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom: and they fetched a compass of seven days' journey: and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them.

When they were unable to find water for their troops, their campaign not only was halted, but they were in danger of being conquered by the Moabites.

Edom at this time was under Judah's authority and joined the alliance. After marching through Judah down the southwestern coast of the Dead Sea, around the southern end, and into Edom, the army ran out of water.

- 10] And the king of Israel said, Alas! that the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!
- 11] But Jehoshaphat said, *Is there* not here a prophet of the LORD, that we may enquire of the LORD by him? And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, Here *is* Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah.

As on an earlier occasion (1 Kgs 22:7) Jehoshaphat suggested they find a prophet of the LORD who could obtain instructions for them. One of Jehoram's officers volunteered that Elisha was nearby. Probably the Lord had directed him there to be ready for this mission; it is unlikely that he was traveling with the army. Pouring water on the hands of another for washing was a servant's work; Elisha had been Elijah's minister (cf. 1 Kgs 19:21). Evidently the officer thought Jehoram did not know Elisha, which may have been the case. Whether Jehoram knew of Elisha or not, Jehoshaphat did. Humbling themselves before the prophet, the three kings paid him a visit.

- 12] And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the LORD is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.

King Jehoshaphat, being a God-fearing man, suggested they call a prophet of God to give them direction. (We could wish he had asked for God's guidance before he formed this alliance with Israel's godless king.) Elisha's response is interesting and reveals his contempt for Jehoram.

- 13] And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab.

Elisha's question is probably an idiom meaning "Why should I obey you?" The prophet's suggestion that Jehoram go to his parents' prophets implies that since the king promoted Baal worship he should seek his own god. This barb forced Jehoram to face up to the impotency of Baal. Jehoram's rejoinder placed the blame for the army's predicament on the LORD. He had come to Elisha because now it was up to Yahweh to get them out of their trouble.

- 14] And Elisha said, *As* the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee.

Elisha was not intimidated by Jehoram's charge. He knew God had not directed Israel into its difficulty but that the army was there on the king's initiative. Nevertheless for Jehoshaphat's sake Elisha consented to seek a word from the Lord. (His words *As* surely as the LORD Almighty lives, whom I serve are strikingly similar to Elijah's words to Jehoram's father Ahab (1 Kgs 17:1; cf. 2 Kgs 5:16). Elisha received a direct revelation and proceeded to explain God's plan. The campaign against Moab demonstrates how utterly abominable heathen religion was to God. The outcome was an object lesson to Israel showing her why she should turn from her idolatry. Nevertheless, she did not turn from it.

Water and Victory

Then God promises that there will be victory—they will be given water and they will completely subjugate Moab. Notice the remarkable way God accomplishes this.

- 15] But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him.

Harp music helped put Elisha into a frame of mind in which he could readily discern the Lord's direction. (David's harp-playing also helped soothe Saul, 1 Sam 16:23.)

- 16] And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Make this valley full of ditches.
- 17] For thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts.
- 18] And this is *but* a light thing in the sight of the LORD: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand.
- 19] And ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones.

Cutting down all the good trees would make it difficult for the Moabites to have fruit to eat and would mean they would have little shade. Stopping up all the springs would limit the Moabites' water supply, and putting large stones in the fields would retard cultivation and lessen their productivity.

- 20] And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat offering was offered, that, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water.

Evidently God caused the water from rains in Edom to flow down into the valley and fill the trenches that had been dug. This water was an expression of God's love for His people. The fact that it had not rained locally probably caused the Moabites to think that having water in the

valley was impossible. The morning sacrifice included a lamb and a grain and drink offering (Ex 29:38-43).

- 21] And when all the Moabites heard that the kings were come up to fight against them, they gathered all that were able to put on armour, and upward, and stood in the border.
- 22] And they rose up early in the morning, and the sun shone upon the water, and the Moabites saw the water on the other side *as* red as blood:
- 23] And they said, This *is* blood: the kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another: now therefore, Moab, to the spoil.

Not expecting water, the Moabites assumed that the water shining in the sunlight was blood. So the Moabite army erroneously concluded that the Israelites, Judahites, and Edomites had had a falling out and had slaughtered each other—not an unrealistic possibility. Thinking that the confederate kings had come to blows and the troops had destroyed each other, the Moabites forget about warfare and each man takes off to get his share of the spoil. This, of course, gives Israel a distinct advantage.

- 24] And when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them: but they went forward smiting the Moabites, even in *their* country.

Rather than advancing with weapons drawn for battle they ran to plunder the “dead” soldiers’ armor and weaponry. But instead, they ran into the waiting ranks of their enemies. Defenseless, the Moabites fled before the Israelites. The Israelites, and presumably their allies with them, invaded Moab, slaughtered the people, destroyed many towns, and did to the fields, springs, and trees what God had instructed (cf. 2 Kgs 3:19).

- 25] And they beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone, and filled it; and they stopped all the wells of water, and felled all the good trees: only in Kirhareth left they the stones thereof; howbeit the slingers went about *it*, and smote it.

Such destruction represented the ordinary war policy of that time, now called a “scorched earth” policy. But Kir Hareth, the major city and King Mesha’s refuge, could not be taken. It was situated at the end of a valley and successfully resisted the attacks of the stone slingers surrounding it.

- 26] And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through *even* unto the king of Edom: but they could not.

Courageously he assembled 700 swordsmen, broke out of the city, and attacked the king of Edom, whom he apparently concluded was the

weakest link in the three-nation alliance. He was not successful, however, and was forced back behind the walls.

- 27] Then he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him *for* a burnt offering upon the wall. And there was great indignation against Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to *their own* land.

Defeat in battle was regarded by pagan Near Eastern warriors as a sign that their gods were angry with them. To propitiate his god, Chemosh (1 Kgs 11:7, 33; 2 Kgs 23:13), Mesha offered his firstborn son, the heir to his throne, as a human sacrifice on top of the city wall. It was not Israel’s intent to annihilate the Moabites; they only wanted to keep their neighbors from rebelling against their sovereignty to keep them under their control. So offensive to the allies was Mesha’s act of sacrificing his son that they withdrew and returned home. Israel had won the battle even though they had not destroyed Kir Hareth or captured Mesha.

“Great indignation in Israel” (*not against*, as in the AV). The Hebrew preposition here indicates that Judah and Israel were indignant because of this abominable act (cf. Lev 18:21; 20:3). [If Israel was so deeply moved in this case, why was she not shocked enough to forsake her own idolatry? But idolatry continued in Israel and in Judah.]

A remarkable archeological discovery, the Moabite Stone, contains Mesha’s own record of this battle and other battles with Israel. On this stone the Moabite king claimed to have been delivered from the Israelites by his god Chemosh on this day. Though it is true that he was not captured at Kir Hareth and the Israelites withdrew, Israel and her allies were the real victors in this campaign. The account of this battle provides further proof of the sovereignty of Yahweh and of the complete vanity of idols and idolatry. But even with so many proofs Israel continued to spurn the Lord and foolishly worshiped pagan deities.

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) List the “good” kings of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.
- 2) Summarize the history of Moab and the Northern Kingdom.
- 3) What was “Baal-Zebub”?
- 4) What was the issue between Ahaziah and Elijah? Between Jehoram and Elisha?
- 5) Contrast the ministries of Elijah and Elisha: how were they different.

- 6) What are the similarities of the powers of Elijah and those of the Two Witnesses of Revelation 11?
- 7) In what ways were the ministries of Elijah and John the Baptist similar? Different?
- 8) What were the *spiritual* lessons in Elijah's and Elisha's miracles?
- 9) Contrast the reigns of Jehoram and Jehoshaphat.

Discussion Questions

("Where two people agree, one is redundant.")

- 1) Discuss the differences between the ministries of Elijah and Elisha.
- 2) Discuss the similarities between Elijah and John the Baptist, and Elijah's prophetic role(s).
- 3) Discuss the aspect of *judgment* in the prophet's behavior and miracles, etc.

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Explore the appearances of the "Angel of the Lord" and why they are regarded as pre-incarnate appearances of Jesus Christ in the OT.
- 2) Explore the *geographic* relationship, if any, between the death of Moses; the translation of Elijah; and, the Mount of Transfiguration. Why did Michael have to fight Satan over the body of Moses (Jude 9)?
- 3) Explore the spiritual (or symbolic) role of horses and chariots in the Scriptures (cf. Isa 31:1; 34:8,9; Ex 14:9, 17; 1Kgs 10:29; Ps 104:3,4; etal.).

Preparation for Next Session:

Read 2 Kings 4-7. Also Daniel 10; Luke 4:23-30; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25.

Session 2 2 Kings 4 - 7

2 Kings 4 Elisha's Miracles

Chapter 4 contains five miracles performed by Elisha. While there is a similarity between the miracles of Elisha and Elijah, the miracles performed by Elisha are more extensive.

- 1] Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.

The place where this incident took place is not stated but probably the widow lived in one of the cities where the schools of the prophets were situated, perhaps Bethel, Gilgal, or Jericho. Since the prophet had a wife it is clear that the company of the prophets was not a monastic settlement (or settlements) of celibates. This widow turned to Elisha for help in her hour of need. She appealed to him on the basis that her husband had been faithful to the Lord (he revered the LORD). The fact that sons were sometimes demanded as payment for debts is frequently indicated in cuneiform records.

- 2] And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil.

Elisha was eager to help the widow. His miracles, as contrasted with Elijah's, frequently involved meeting the needs of individuals. Her little bit of oil was olive oil used for food and fuel.

- 3] Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, *even* empty vessels; borrow not a few.

Elisha told her to collect empty jars; they would be filled with oil God would provide. The widow's faith can be "measured" by the number of jars she collected in response to the prophet's instructions.

- 4] And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full.

Shutting the door provided privacy for the task of pouring the oil. Not everyone was to see the miracle take place; only the widow and her sons, the direct beneficiaries of God's grace, should see it. But later she probably told all her friends about God's miraculous provision.

- 5] So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought *the vessels* to her; and she poured out.
- 6] And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, *There is* not a vessel more. And the oil stayed.

God provided oil enough to fill all the jars the woman had collected, all she felt she needed.

- 7] Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.

She returned to Elisha with a report of the miracle and he told her to sell the oil and pay her debts. The debt could now be paid without the loss of needed sons. There was enough money left over for her to live on after all her financial obligations had been met. Elisha is called a man of God, a term used of several prophets in 1 and 2 Kings. This story demonstrates God's care for His faithful ones who lived in apostate Israel at this time. Widows were always vulnerable and the widow of a prophet would have been even more needy. Yet God miraculously cared for this faithful, dependent believer. God's concern for women and their special needs can be seen clearly in both the preceding and the following incident:

- 8] And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where *was* a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And *so* it was, *that* as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread.

In contrast with the poor widow in the previous story this woman in Shunem (near Jezreel) was well-to-do and had a husband. Elisha evidently stopped at her house regularly at her invitation as he traveled between Samaria, Jezreel, and other cities.

- 9] And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this *is* an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually.
10] Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.

The woman's faith in Yahweh is seen in her desire to be a blessing to the man of God. Apparently she was more spiritually sensitive and outgoing than her husband (cf. comments on v. 23). He did, however, consent to his wife's proposal to build a guest room on the typically flat roof of their house and to furnish it for Elisha's comfort.

- 11] And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there.
12] And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him.
13] And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what *is* to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people.

After Elisha had enjoyed this couple's hospitality for some time he desired to do something for them in return. He asked his servant Gehazi to express his offer to the woman. (Perhaps this was to make the woman feel more inclined to ask for something than she would have if the prophet addressed her.) God's grace to His faithful ones can be seen in

Elisha's offer. Elisha obviously enjoyed a position of some influence in the palace even though he opposed Jehoram's religious policies. The woman's reply (I have a home among my own people) expressed contentment with her lot in life; she was at peace and felt no special needs.

- 14] And he said, What then *is* to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old.

Determined to return her favors, Elisha discussed with Gehazi after she left his room what he might do for her. Gehazi observed that she had no son and probably never would have one since her husband was old.

- 15] And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door.
16] And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, *thou* man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid.

Elisha called her back and told her that she would have a son in about a year. This miraculous birth would be God's gift to her for her goodness to His servant. The woman's response to this announcement does not mean that she did not want a son: every Israelite woman did. To be childless was regarded in Israel as a great personal tragedy. Her reply simply indicates that she felt having a son was impossible. She urged Elisha not to build up her hopes only to disappoint her later.

- 17] And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life.
18] And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers.
19] And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother.

But, one morning while the child, still quite young, was out in the fields with his father in the heat of harvesttime a violent headache overtook him.

- 20] And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and *then* died.

He was carried back to his mother but failed to improve and died shortly thereafter, perhaps from sunstroke. Clearly the lad was dead, not just sick (cf. 2 Kgs 4:32), and his mother knew it.

- 21] And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut *the door* upon him, and went out.
22] And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again.

Her thoughts turned immediately to Elisha and she prepared to seek his help. Perhaps she did not tell her husband that her son had died because she feared he would not let her go if he knew the boy was dead.

- 23] And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him to day? *it is* neither new moon, nor sabbath. And she said, *It shall be* well.

When she told him she wanted to see Elisha (the man of God; cf. vv. 9, 16, 21, 25 [twice], 27 [twice]), he questioned the need since it was not the New Moon or the Sabbath, occasions for religious festivals. The husband's spiritual concerns seem to have been superficial and ritualistic. Her words, *It shall be well*, were simply designed to avoid further explanation and delay.

- 24] Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not *thy* riding for me, except I bid thee.

Quickly the woman rode her donkey, while her servant led. Elisha was only a few miles away at Mount Carmel. Interestingly she knew where to find him.

- 25] So she went and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, *yonder is* that Shunammite:
26] Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, *Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child?* And she answered, *It is well.*

When the prophet saw her coming he sent Gehazi to intercept her. But she would not be delayed with explanations; she hurried on to Elisha.

- 27] And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul *is* vexed within her: and the LORD hath hid *it* from me, and hath not told me.

Arriving where Elisha was, she grasped his feet, a gesture indicating extreme humility, need, and desperation. Gehazi felt that her behavior was improper, but Elisha recognized it as the expression of deepest grief. The LORD sometimes informed his prophets beforehand of situations they would face (e.g., 1 Kgs 14:5), but this time He did not.

- 28] Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?

As is common under extreme stress, the woman's first words to Elisha did not tell him why she had come but how she felt about what had happened. She referred to the fact that having a son who died was a loss of her hopes, much like never having a son at all. She was so grieved at her son's death she felt it would have been better if he had never been born.

- 29] Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child.

Elisha probably understood that the lad had died; he probably would not have done anything without first learning what had happened. He sent Gehazi with his staff, the symbol of his authority as a prophet of the Lord, and instructed him to lay it on the boy's face. Either Elisha believed God would honor this method or he wanted to teach a lesson. Gehazi was to go immediately to Shunem; he was not to greet anyone he met on the way or return their greetings. (People in the East lost much time giving and returning prolonged greetings.)

- 30] And the mother of the child said, *As* the LORD liveth, and *as* thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her.

The mother told Elisha that she would not leave him. (Cf. comments on words similar to *As surely as the LORD lives*, in 1 Kings 17:1. That same and similar phrases occur seven times in 1 Kings and seven in 2 Kings.)

- 31] And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but *there was* neither voice, nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked.

So Elisha got up and followed her back to Shunem. Gehazi went on ahead of Elisha who apparently followed his servant at a slower pace. Gehazi followed Elisha's instructions but the boy did not awaken to life. So Gehazi returned to his master and reported what had happened.

- 32] And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, *and* laid upon his bed.

That the boy was indeed dead is stated again (cf. v. 20).

- 33] He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD.
34] And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm.

The earnestness of Elisha's entreaty to the LORD is reflected in his prone posture. The boy's body grew warm from contact with Elisha; God was beginning to answer the prophet's prayer.

- 35] Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.

Elisha then paced back and forth in the room, apparently continuing to pour out his soul in fervent, persistent prayer. He returned to prostrate himself on the body of the lad once again. These actions were not some kind of magic; they were the natural physical expressions of a man engaged in earnest prayer. God restored the lad's life, air returned to his lungs, he sneezed seven times (seven indicating a work of God; cf. 5:14), and opened his eyes. These were the first signs that God had restored his life.

- 36] And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son.
37] Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out.

When she entered the room and saw her son alive she first fell at Elisha's feet out of respect and gratitude (cf. v. 27), and bowed to the ground before the Lord in worship. Then she took her son, probably in her arms, and left the room full of joy and gratitude for what God had done for her. Throughout this story evidences of the woman's faith keep shining through (cf. vv. 8-10, 16, 21-22, 24-25, 27, 30, 37). God rewarded her trust with a miraculous birth and a miraculous restoration to life.

Gehazi's failure to restore the boy to life by using Elisha's staff shows that the living God works in response to the requests of trusting people rather than magically through a fetish (Elisha's staff). Baal, a god of fertility, undoubtedly suffered ignominy as this story of Yahweh's provision of life circulated in Israel (cf. 1 Kgs 17:21-22).

- 38] And Elisha came again to Gilgal: and *there was* a dearth in the land; and the sons of the prophets *were* sitting before him: and he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets.

The fact that this incident took place in a time of famine is important to a correct understanding of the story. This famine may have been the same one(s) referred to later (6:25; 7:4; 8:1) or a different one (cf. the famine in Elijah's days, 1 Kgs 18:2). (These stories of Elisha's ministry are evidently not in strict chronological order but were arranged by the writer in sequence for a variety of reasons: similar subject matter, related lessons, geographical connections, etc.) Though there was a famine Elisha prepared to feed the prophets with whatever could be collected. He asked his servant (Gehazi or another person) to prepare the stew pot for a meal.

- 39] And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred *them* into the pot of pottage: for they knew *them* not.

One of the prophets went out to gather whatever he could find growing wild to put in the stew. Finding a wild vine, he gathered some of its gourds cut them up, and put them into the pot: Wild cucumbers, eggshaped gourds having a bitter taste and producing colic and violent diarrhea when eaten. The young man mistook them for the edible variety (cf. Num 11:5).

- 40] So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O *thou* man of God, *there is* death in the pot. And they could not eat *thereof*.

The unknown gourds had a horrible taste and may have caused some violent physical reactions in those who tasted the stew. They assumed that it was another similar plant, the colocynth, which also was poisonous and bitter tasting. The prophets concluded that the gourds had poisoned the stew.

- 41] But he said, Then bring meal. And he cast *it* into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot.

Elisha added some flour to the stew. Not much of it could have been available in a famine; but with this additive the stew became quite palatable and the prophets ate it without harm. In Elisha's day a spiritual famine had resulted from the people's turning from God and His Law. The people were hungry spiritually. In an effort to satisfy their need they had imbibed a false religion called Baalism. It looked harmless enough but proved disgusting and deadly. God's prophets helped counteract the deadly effects of Baalism in Israel.

- 42] And there came a man from Baalshalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat.

Baal Shalishah, "House of Three Valleys" (1 Sam 9:4), was a town close to Gilgal so this incident may have taken place about the same time as the preceding one. Evidently the famine still persisted. The man who brought the bread and grain to the man of God (Elisha; cf. v. 21) was apparently a believer in the Lord, taking these items as the firstfruits offering of his harvest to God (cf. Num 18:13; Deut 18:4).

- 43] And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the LORD, They shall eat, and shall leave *thereof*.

When Elisha suggested to his servant (Gehazi) that the food be given to feed the 100 men assembled (probably the company of the prophets; cf. 2 Kgs 4:38), the servant's response indicated that it was far too little.

Nevertheless Elisha ordered him to distribute it and assured him that the LORD had promised there would be plenty and some would be left over. The servant obeyed and God multiplied the food as He had promised.

- 44] So he set *it* before them, and they did eat, and left *thereof*, according to the word of the LORD.

This miracle instructed all who heard of it that God could multiply the limited resources (cf. 1 Kgs 17:7-16) that were dedicated to Him and with them nourish and sustain a large multitude. Baal, a god of fertility known as “the lord of the earth,” had no such power.

2 Kings 5 Naaman the Syrian

Elisha’s ministry expanded beyond the borders of Israel as recorded in this story of another miracle he performed.

- 1] Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, *but he was a leper*.

Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram, Ben-Hadad II (860-841). He was a successful and courageous warrior, highly regarded because of the victories God had given the Arameans under his leadership. However, he had leprosy (perhaps this was not leprosy as it is known today). This dreaded disease degenerated its victims and eventually proved fatal. No cure for it was known. In Israel lepers were normally isolated from nonlepers, but this was not always the custom in other nations including Aram. Naaman was able to carry on his duties as long as the disease permitted him to.

- 2] And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman’s wife.

In the course of their occasional battles with Israel, Naaman’s forces had captured some Israelites whom they made slaves. One of these was a young girl whom Naaman had given to his wife as a servant. Evidently Naaman and his wife were kind to this girl because she sought Naaman’s welfare.

- 3] And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord *were* with the prophet that *is* in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.

She told her mistress, who told her husband, that a prophet living in Samaria could cure leprosy. This was Elisha; he lived in a house in the capital city (6:24, 32). Probably the girl had heard of Elisha before she was carried off

as a slave. Apparently she assumed he could cleanse leprosy in view of his supernatural power. No leper in Israel, though, was healed in Elisha’s day (Lk 4:27). Later the slave girl’s faith in the Lord may have been an indirect rebuke to Israel’s King Jehoram who had no faith in God.

- 4] And *one* went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that *is* of the land of Israel.
5] And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand *pieces* of gold, and ten changes of raiment.

The Aramean king was anxious for his valuable commander to be cleansed, not only because he was a trusted friend but because the dreaded disease would eventually rob the king of his top military commander. Naaman set out to visit King Jehoram who he assumed would order the prophet to cure him. With him the commander took gifts of 10 talents (ca. 750 pounds) of silver, 600 shekels (ca. 150 pounds) of gold, and 10 sets of clothing, all prized gifts in the Near East.

- 6] And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have *therewith* sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy.
7] And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, *Am* I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.

Jehoram was dismayed when he read the letter from Ben-Hadad II. Tearing one’s robes indicated great anxiety and distress (cf. 2:12; 6:30; 11:14). Israel and Aram had been at peace, but it appeared to Jehoram that Ben-Hadad was trying to pick a fight again as he had done with Jehoram’s father Ahab (cf. 1 Kgs 20:1-3). Jehoram did not realize that Naaman did not expect *him* to cure the leprosy. Elisha did not even enter Jehoram’s mind. The Israelite king had no use for that prophet who constantly opposed him. Jehoram wanted as little contact with him as possible.

- 8] And it was *so*, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.

When Elisha learned of Jehoram’s anxiety over Ben-Hadad’s letter he sent the king a message not to worry. If Jehoram would send Naaman to him the prophet would cure him. Naaman would learn, even if Jehoram had not, that there was a true prophet in Israel.

- 9] So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha.
- 10] And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.

Not at all awed by the great general, Elisha did not even go out to meet him! Instead he sent a messenger to convey his simple “prescription:” Naaman was told to dip seven times in the Jordan River and he would be free of his disease. (The cure lay not in the water of the Jordan but in obedient faith in God’s promise through His prophet.)

- 11] But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.
- 12] *Are not Abana and Parpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.*

Naaman turned from Elisha’s house angry for two reasons: (1) His pride had been offended by Elisha’s offhanded treatment of him; he had expected a cleansing ceremony in keeping with his own dignity. (2) He resented having been told to wash in a muddy river that he considered inferior to the Abana and Parpar rivers in his hometown; the water of the Jordan, he thought, could not possibly do him any good.

- 13] And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, *if* the prophet had bid thee *do some* great thing, wouldest thou not have done *it?* how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?

The commander’s servants had not been personally put down as their master had, and could view the situation more objectively. Approaching him tenderly they appealed to him as a father to be reasonable. They pointed out that it was not as though Elisha had requested something difficult (some great thing). What harm would there be in giving his remedy a try?

- 14] Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Undoubtedly feeling rather ashamed Naaman humbled himself and obeyed the word of the Lord. As he obeyed in faith he was cleansed. God did even more for him and restored his flesh to its soft boyhood texture. The fact that in Elisha’s day an Aramean leper was healed whereas no Israelite leper was (Lk 4:27) points up Israel’s apostasy. [A Personal note: The late Walter Martin, preaching on “the foolishness of God,” (1 Cor 1:20-25) used this episode in his string of examples of how

God seems to go out of His way to use “foolishness” to accomplish His purposes. The ultimate “foolishness” is, of course, the Cross (1 Cor 1:18)!]

- 15] And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that *there is* no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant.

Naaman returned from the Jordan to Elisha’s house in Samaria (about 25 miles) with a heart full of gratitude and hands full of gifts. Rather than expecting Elisha to come to him he willingly stood before the prophet and testified to his belief that Israel’s God is the only true God. (Unfortunately many in Israel, including her king, had not come to the same realization.) This was the highest purpose of Naaman’s healing from God’s point of view.

- 16] But he said, *As* the LORD liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take *it*; but he refused.

Elisha agreed that the LORD whom he served lives. But the prophet refused to accept any reward for his ministry. Naaman’s urging did not budge Elisha. The man of God had not performed his miracle for reward but at the word of the Lord and he did not want anyone to think otherwise. The false prophets could easily be bought, but not Elisha.

- 17] And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules’ burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD.

Since Elisha would not take anything, Naaman asked him to give as much earth as he could carry back to Damascus on two mules. He intended to use this in making an altar to the Lord. Many polytheists believed that no god could be worshiped except in its own land or on an altar built with the dirt of that land.

- 18] In this thing the LORD pardon thy servant, *that* when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing.

Naaman proposed to worship only Yahweh Himself (the LORD), but superstition shaped his thinking. In the course of his official duties, however, he would have to give token respect to the god of his master the king. The god of Damascus was Hadad-Rimmon, a god of rain and thunder, here shortened to Rimmon. It was Naaman’s duty to participate in this official worship with the king and probably other officials of state. The commander was not prepared to risk his life, as Daniel’s three friends

would (Dan 3:12), by refusing to bow before an idol. But one must remember that Naaman was not an Israelite with the advantage of knowledge of the revealed Word of God. Perhaps his responsibility therefore was not as great as an Israelite's would have been.

19] And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way.

Elisha's departing benediction (Go in peace) probably was a blessing on the journey ahead of Naaman rather than on the compromising behavior the general had outlined (vv. 17-18), which the prophet neither approved nor disapproved verbally.

20] But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, *as* the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him.

Gehazi became greedy of what Naaman had offered to give Elisha. Evidently he justified his greed by reasoning that since Naaman was an Aramean, a natural enemy of Israel, he should at least be taken advantage of.

21] So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw *him* running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, *Is* all well?

So Gehazi pursued Naaman to get something from him. Gehazi was able to overtake the large slow-moving caravan on foot. Naaman got down from his chariot (cf. 4:26) and asked if everything was all right.

22] And he said, All *is* well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments.

Gehazi said everything was all right but then lied to the commander. He said his master had received unexpected guests (two prophets) and wanted to give them some silver and a change of clothing each. Gehazi put this lie in Elisha's mouth and made the request sound very unselfish.

23] And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid *them* upon two of his servants; and they bare *them* before him.

Naaman was happy to oblige and urged Gehazi to accept twice as much silver as well as the clothing. He even provided two servants to carry these gifts back to Elisha.

24] And when he came to the tower, he took *them* from their hand, and bestowed *them* in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed.

Gehazi followed the servants and when they arrived at the hill (on which Samaria was built) he took the gifts from them and put them in his house.

25] But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence *comest thou*, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither.

Shortly thereafter Gehazi returned to Elisha. He did not realize that God had revealed his whereabouts to his master.

26] And he said unto him, Went not mine heart *with thee*, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? *Is it* a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?

So to cover one lie he told another. Elisha then explained that he was aware of everything Gehazi had done. Elisha added that true servants of the Lord should not take personal rewards from people, especially influential non-Israelites, in return for blessings that God, not His servant, had given them. False prophets were selfishly lining their own pockets and bringing contempt on the prophetic office; true prophets should avoid conduct that might be misunderstood as self-seeking.

27] The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper *as white* as snow.

Naaman's leprosy had been removed from him for his trust in and obedience to God. Now, ironically, leprosy would cling to Gehazi for his lack of trust in and obedience to God. The servant had brought dishonor to Yahweh's name. "If you buy these, you also buy Naaman's leprosy." Naaman had become an Israelite, but Gehazi became a pagan through sin (cf. Mt 6:31-34). Naaman's conversion was to show the Israelites how easily the Lord could turn the hearts of their adversaries and thereby make them worshipers of Jehovah, fellow believers with the Jews themselves.

A bad case of leprosy turned one's skin and hair white as snow. Gehazi's judgment was serious because his sin had far-reaching consequences; this story was probably told all over Aram and Israel. As a servant of God Gehazi had more privilege than most people and therefore more responsibility than most people.

This story contains many lessons: Naaman's healing was another great proof of the Lord's power to restore health, power which only Baal supposedly possessed. This incident also helped spread the fame of Yahweh to another part of the ancient world. The contrasting behaviors of Elisha and Gehazi also model positive and negative attitudes and

actions for God's servants of all ages. This was one of the several examples that Jesus Himself referred to in His sermon at Nazareth (Lk 4:27). (Why did they then try to throw Jesus off a cliff in response?)

2 Kings 6

Elisha and the Syrians

- 1] And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us.

Their accommodations had become inadequate because of the growing number of young men, a tribute to the effectiveness of Elisha's ministry. This may have been the school at Jericho since the young men went to the nearby Jordan River for their wood.

- 2] Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye.
3] And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go.
4] So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood.
5] But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed.

In the process of cutting down trees an iron axhead flew off its handle and fell into the river. The man wielding the ax cried out to his lord (i.e., to Elisha) in dismay because his tool had been borrowed.

- 6] And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast *it* in thither; and the iron did swim.

Ascertaining where the axhead had fallen into the water Elisha threw a stick into the river. Miraculously the iron implement floated to the surface. The workman was able to retrieve it easily.

- 7] Therefore said he, Take *it* up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it.

Certainly this miracle encouraged the group of faithful followers of the Lord that their God really is alive and that He would supernaturally provide for their needs even though many Israelites in that day had turned from the true God to Baal.

Special Intelligence Insight

- 8] Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place *shall be* my camp.

The Arameans were sometimes at war and sometimes at peace with Israel during the years of Elisha's ministry. At the time of this particular incident the Arameans were making profitable surprise raids into Israel. The king of Aram (cf. 5:1) was probably Ben-Hadad II. (Of the major persons in this narrative only Elisha is mentioned by name. This may suggest that readers should focus on the Lord and His prophet.) In preparation for another raid Ben-Hadad planned to pitch his camp on the border of Israel from which he could strike unexpectedly.

- 9] And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down.

However, God informed Elisha of the place and the prophet passed his information on to the king of Israel (Jehoram) with a warning to beware.

- 10] And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice.

Jehoram checked Elisha's information, found it to be correct, prepared for the encounter, and frustrated Ben-Hadad's secret attack. *This happened several times.*

- 11] Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us *is* for the king of Israel?

Enraged by his continual failure to surprise the Israelites Ben-Hadad concluded that one of his men was tipping off the enemy.

- 12] And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that *is* in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.

The first recorded phone tap! An officer assured the king that there were no traitors in his camp but that it was Elisha who had supernatural knowledge of all his plans. The very words you speak in your bedroom mean even his most private conversations were known to the prophet. Obviously this officer had somehow learned of Elisha and his powers.

- 13] And he said, Go and spy where he *is*, that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold, *he is* in Dothan.

As long as Elisha remained free the army of Aram would be unsuccessful, so Ben-Hadad ordered that he be located and captured. He stealthily sent a strong contingent of soldiers with horses and chariots by night and completely surrounded Dothan (12 miles north of Samaria), where Elisha was staying.

14] Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about.

The fact that Ben-Hadad would try to take Elisha by surprise even after the prophet had repeatedly anticipated the Arameans' moves indicates the king's lack of faith in the supernatural origin of Elisha's ability. Therefore he needed to be convinced that Yahweh is the living and true God.

15] And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?

(Since Gehazi had been dismissed as a disobedient servant and "leper" (5:27), the Naaman story must follow this one if Elisha's servant here is Gehazi. Or this servant may be someone who replaced Gehazi.) Early the next morning the servant was terrified to see that the whole city was under the Arameans' control, or so he thought. He returned in a frenzy to Elisha and nervously asked, What shall we do? The servant's anxiety reflected his lack of understanding and trust in the Lord which, one would think, Elisha's previous revelations would have changed.

16] And he answered, Fear not: for they that *be* with us *are* more than they that *be* with them.

Elisha was not at all disturbed by the present situation. He encouraged his aide to stop fearing, and assured him that they had behind them a force superior to that of the enemy.

17] And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain *was* full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

Elisha then, probably with some frustration or impatience, asked the LORD to enable his servant to see this host and the Lord did so. He gave the servant the ability to see the normally unseen world of invisible spirits (angels) that are constantly ready to do God's bidding (cf. Gen 28:12). The hills around Dothan were filled with superior horses and chariots. These appeared as fiery agents of God suggesting to the servant their extraterrestrial origin (cf. 2 Kgs 2:11). The LORD had surrounded the armies of Aram and was in complete control.

18] And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

19] And Elisha said unto them, This *is* not the way, neither *is* this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria.

Elisha said, This is not the road and this is not the city for that road and city were not where God intended them to go. They unknowingly followed Elisha inside the walls of Samaria, the capital of Israel.

20] And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these *men*, that they may see. And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, *they were* in the midst of Samaria.

What the Israelite army might not have been able to do except with much fighting and loss of life, God did peacefully through one man. In response to Elisha's prayer God opened the eyes of the Arameans and they discovered that they were surrounded and helpless captives at the mercy of the king of Israel.

21] And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite *them*? shall I smite *them*?

22] And he answered, Thou shalt not smite *them*: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master.

Elisha said no. Jehoram probably would not have killed soldiers captured in battle and furthermore God's purpose was not to destroy the Arameans' lives but to save the Israelites' lives. The king then assured them of this in an unusual way. By setting a great feast before the soldiers he was expressing confidence in God's ability to control the enemy; Israel had absolutely nothing to fear and could even treat these soldiers as friends because God had them in His sovereign power.

23] And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.

In the ancient Near East eating together under one's roof constituted making a covenant of peace.¹ The Arameans were now bound by social custom not to attack the friend who had extended his gift of hospitality and protection. For these reasons the Arameans stopped raiding Israel's territory for a time. This incident demonstrates Yahweh is His people's defense. So to depart from Him was the height of folly. Israel's victory by means of God's prophet rather than by warriors undoubtedly should have encouraged many in Israel and Aram to fear the Almighty God. However, Jehoram and the nation of Israel failed to turn back to the Lord as a result of the previous incident. Consequently God sent a more severe situation to draw them back to Himself:

24] And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria.

- 25] And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was *sold* for fourscore *pieces* of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five *pieces* of silver.

Since no one could leave or enter the capital, a great famine resulted. It was so severe that one donkey's head, one of the least nourishing and most repulsive parts of this animal, *unclean to the Israelites*, became a highly valued commodity selling for 80 shekels (ca. two pounds) of silver. Approximately a half pint of (NIV, seed pods; KJV & LXX, dove's dung), normally considered animal fodder, cost 5 shekels (ca. two ounces) of silver.

- 26] And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king.
27] And he said, If the LORD do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress?

Jehoram's reply (Where can I get help for you?) to a woman who called to him revealed his frustration. He was angry with the LORD for permitting this situation (cf. v. 33). God had promised that such conditions would discipline His people if they turned from Him (Lev 26:29; Deut 28:53, 57). Jehoram sarcastically told the woman that he could not provide bread from the grain on the threshing floor or wine from the grapes in the winepress; he was not greater than God was supposed to be.

- 28] And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son to morrow.

Having vented his frustration with these words the king then invited the woman to explain her problem. She said that a friend had persuaded her to cook her son but the next day, when the friend was to cook her son she had hidden him.

- 29] So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son.
30] And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, *he had* sackcloth within upon his flesh.

Learning the desperate extent to which the siege had driven his people, the king angrily tore his robes, an expression of deep distress and sorrow (cf. 2:12; 5:7; 11:14). Sackcloth, coarse material made from black goat's hair, was worn as a symbol of repentance and self-affliction.

- 31] Then he said, God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day.

But Jehoram's repentance seems to have been rather shallow in view of his attitude toward God's servant Elisha. Rather than dealing with the real cause of God's discipline, his own apostasy, Jehoram blamed Elisha who had perhaps only explained the reason for Israel's condition.

- 32] But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him; and *the king* sent a man from before him: but ere the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head? look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door: *is* not the sound of his master's feet behind him?

The elders who were sitting with Elisha in his house (cf. 5:9) were the officials of the land. Perhaps they were meeting with the prophet to discuss what should be done. Warned by God, Elisha announced that the king was sending someone to have him beheaded. The prophet's instruction to the elders to bar the door against the executioner was evidently intended to postpone any violence until Jehoram himself would arrive. (Is not the sound of his master's footsteps behind him?) The instruction would also give Elisha opportunity to announce God's message of imminent deliverance.

- 33] And while he yet talked with them, behold, the messenger came down unto him: and he said, Behold, this evil *is* of the LORD; what should I wait for the LORD any longer?

When Jehoram did arrive he asked Elisha why he should wait any longer for God to act. Apparently Elisha had told Jehoram that God had said he should not surrender to Ben-Hadad but should wait for divine deliverance. Since that help was not forthcoming Jehoram had decided to take matters into his own hands. As he had done many times before he was disobeying the orders of his Lord through Elisha, acting as an unfaithful administrator (cf. 1 Sam 15:11). Since, as Jehoram stated, the disaster (the siege and the famine) was from the LORD, the king should have obeyed Him.

2 Kings 7 The Famine

- 1] Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the LORD, To morrow about this time *shall* a measure of fine flour *be sold* for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.

Within 24 hours the siege would be over and there would be plenty to eat. A seah (ca. seven quarts) of flour would sell for a shekel (about two-fifths of an ounce) and two seahs (ca. 13-14 quarts) of barley (for cattle

to eat) would sell for the same price (cf. v. 16) at the gate of the city where business of this sort was normally transacted. These prices were not unusually low but compared with what the people had been paying during the famine (cf. 6:25) they were great bargains.

- 2] Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, *if* the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see *it* with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.

The officer assisting Jehoram (cf. 7:17 and the comments on 5:8) found this prophecy incredible. His retort expressed his utter disbelief that God would or could do this. Elisha replied that the officer would see the miracle with his own eyes; it would indeed take place. But because of his unbelief he would not experience the blessing (cf. v.17).

- 3] And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die?
4] If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine *is* in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die.

The four lepers may have been housed in huts just outside the city gate; they were isolated from contact with nonlepers in Israel. Of their three options, they correctly concluded that their best choice lay in giving themselves up to the Arameans. They might be killed but, they reasoned, that would be better than dying gradually of starvation.

- 5] And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, *there was* no man there.
6] For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, *even* the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us.

The text explains the reason for the soldiers' departure: The Lord had caused them to hear noises from the north and the south that made them think the armies of the Hittites (who earlier had lived in the area now called Turkey but were now living in enclaves in Aram). ("Musrians": Not Egyptians, as in the KJV. Musri is in Syria (1Kgs 10:28). Shalmaneser III enumerates Musri among his adversaries at Qarqar in 853 B.C. Hittites as mercenary bands were common and available, though their empire had long since fallen. Egyptian mercenaries were neither common nor available.)

- 7] Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it *was*, and fled for their life.

- 8] And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid *it*; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence *also*, and went and hid *it*.
9] Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day *is* a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household.

But gradually their sense of duty to their fellow Samaritans convicted them. Also they reasoned that if they failed to report the situation, others would discover in the morning that the enemy had fled and they would be punished for not announcing the situation to the starving population. Rather than suffer as criminals they preferred to be treated as heroes. So they decided to return to Samaria and proclaim their good news.

- 10] So they came and called unto the porter of the city: and they told them, saying, We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold, *there was* no man there, neither voice of man, but horses tied, and asses tied, and the tents as they *were*.
11] And he called the porters; and they told *it* to the king's house within.

The lepers returned to Samaria and told the city gatekeepers their story. The news spread like wildfire through the city during the night (cf. vv. 9).

- 12] And the king arose in the night, and said unto his servants, I will now shew you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we *be* hungry; therefore are they gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city.

But the king suspected a trap. He calculated that since the Arameans had not been able to break into Samaria they had planned this apparent retreat to draw the Samaritans out, leaving the city open to invasion.

- 13] And one of his servants answered and said, Let *some* take, I pray thee, five of the horses that remain, which are left in the city, (behold, they *are* as all the multitude of Israel that are left in it: behold, *I say*, they *are* even as all the multitude of the Israelites that are consumed:;) and let us send and see.

One of Jehoram's officers proposed sending only five horsemen out to scout the Aramean camp. If these soldiers were caught their deaths would only be hastened; he thought death was inescapable for all the people in Samaria.

- 14] They took therefore two chariot horses; and the king sent after the host of the Syrians, saying, Go and see.
15] And they went after them unto Jordan: and, lo, all the way *was* full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste. And the messengers returned, and told the king.

The chariot drivers followed a trail of discarded clothing and equipment all the way to the Jordan River, about 25 miles from Samaria. Israel's enemy then had crossed the Jordan and was far away. The drivers returned to Samaria and announced the good news to the king.

- 16] And the people went out, and spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was *sold* for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the LORD.

The king apparently threw the gates open before the excited multitudes who streamed out to find food and booty. Those who found the food first were able to sell it to their neighbors for the same prices the LORD had predicted through Elisha (cf. v. 1).

- 17] And the king appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned to have the charge of the gate: and the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died, as the man of God had said, who spake when the king came down to him.
- 18] And it came to pass as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, Two measures of barley for a shekel, and a measure of fine flour for a shekel, shall be to morrow about this time in the gate of Samaria:
- 19] And that lord answered the man of God, and said, Now, behold, *if* the LORD should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.
- 20] And so it fell out unto him: for the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died.

So heavy was the traffic through the gate that the officer who assisted the king (cf. v. 2 and the comment on 5:18) and who had been stationed there to insure an orderly departure was trampled to death. This man had ridiculed God's ability to do what He said He would do (cf. v. 2). The fate that Elisha had predicted overtook him. Yahweh, not Baal, provides food; in fact God even foretold exactly when He would provide it. The remarkable way in which God kept the Samaritans safe and sustained them should have turned them and the king back to Him. God's future discipline of the Israelites can be understood better in the light of their rejection of His many gracious and miraculous provisions for them.

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) List the miracles in this session and the spiritual implications of each.
- 2) What angered Naaman on his visit to Elisha? What finally healed him?

- 3) Why did Jesus allude to the healing of Naaman in his address at Nazareth (Lk 4:27)?
- 4) What are the lessons of the Syrian siege of Elisha at Dothan? For today?
 - a) Chariots of fire;
 - b) The sojourn to Samaria.
 - c) Cf. Daniel 10:12-13, 20.
- 5) Summarize Elisha's role in the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Aramean empire of Ben-Hadad.

Discussion Questions

("Where two people agree, one is redundant.")

- 1) Review the miracles and the lessons they teach:
The concerns of God in each;
Their prophetic (type) significance;
Demonstrations of the attributes of God.
- 2) What are the *personal* lessons in the healing of Naaman?
- 3) Why did the people attempt to throw Jesus off a cliff because of His sermon in Luke 4:25-30)?
- 4) (What was the common thread among His examples?)
- 5) What does sin and leprosy have in common?
- 6) What were the main *spiritual* lessons in this session?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Study the role and characteristics of *angels* in the Scriptures.
- 2) List examples where God seems to use "foolishness" to accomplish His ends (1 Cor 1:18-25).
- 3) Trace the applications of *famines* in the Scriptures.

Preparation for Next Session:

Read 2 Kings 8 – 10.

Notes:

1. J. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch in Its Cultural Environment*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974, p. 157.

Session 3

2 Kings 8 - 10

Jehoram's evil reign in Judah (8:16-24); Ahaziah's evil reign in Judah (8:25-9:29); Jehu's evil reign in Israel (9:30-10:36).

2 Kings 8

The Preservation of the Shunammite Woman

This story illustrates God's marvelous care of those who trust in Him even in times of popular apostasy.

- 1] Then spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the LORD hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years.

Elisha had directed his benefactress and her family (cf. 4:8-37) to leave Israel temporarily. The LORD had revealed to His prophet that He would bring a seven-year famine on the land (cf. 4:38; 6:25; 7:4). This was a punishment for apostasy (cf. Deut. 11:16-17; 28:38-40; 1 Kings 18:2).

- 2] And the woman arose, and did after the saying of the man of God: and she went with her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years.
- 3] And it came to pass at the seven years' end, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines: and she went forth to cry unto the king for her house and for her land.

Returning to Israel, the woman appeared before King Jehoram to beg for her former property which has been taken over by someone else in her absence. She may not have been asking that her property be given to her but that she be permitted to buy it back since it was apparently her paternal inheritance, guaranteed to each Israelite family by the Law of Moses.

- 4] And the king talked with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done.

(Since King Jehoram was talking to Gehazi (Elisha's servant) when the woman called on the king, this incident must have taken place before Gehazi became a leper (5:27).)

- 5] And it came to pass, as he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body to life, that, behold, the woman, whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land. And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this *is* the woman, and this *is* her son, whom Elisha restored to life.

Jehoram's interest in Elisha seems to have been motivated by curiosity rather than conviction; there is no evidence that Jehoram ever abandoned his apostate ways and became a faithful follower of the Lord. Elisha's resuscitation of the Shunammite's son (4:32-37) was a great event to recount. Amazingly Gehazi's telling of it was interrupted by the woman herself who had come to present her request to the king.

- 6] And when the king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that *was* hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now.

The woman and her son's timely appearance so impressed Jehoram that he asked the woman to fill in some details of Gehazi's story, which she did. Besides permitting her to return to her former homestead, the king even ordered that the proceeds from the land, since she had left it, be paid to her. The perfect timing of God's actions stands out in this brief narrative. God preserved His faithful Shunammite believer by removing her from the famine before it began and by bringing her before the king at a uniquely propitious moment. Jehoram had been uniquely prepared by Gehazi to help her.

Hazael's Murder of Ben-Hadad II

- 7] And Elisha came to Damascus; and Benhadad the king of Syria was sick; and it was told him, saying, The man of God is come hither.

Elisha visited Damascus, the capital of Aram, and Ben-Hadad, as the old enemy of Israel was ill. (He died in 841 B.C.) Elisha was well known to the king for the prophet had performed many miracles that affected the Arameans. It was unusual for Elisha to go all the way up to Damascus from Israel.

- 8] And the king said unto Hazael, Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God, and enquire of the LORD by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?

The king instructed his official Hazael to greet Elisha by taking him a gift. Having respect for the LORD Ben-Hadad asked Hazael to ask God's prophet if he would recover from his illness.

- 9] So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, and came and stood before him, and said, Thy son Benhadad king of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?

(The 40-camel caravan may not have carried as much wealth as one might suppose. It was customary in the ancient Near East to make a great show of giving gifts and it was fairly common to have one camel carry only one gift.) Referring to Ben-Hadad as Elisha's son, Hazael was courteously

deferring to Elisha (cf. “father” in 5:13; 6:21). Elisha was evidently staying at some house or inn in Damascus.

- 10] And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the LORD hath shewed me that he shall surely die.
- 11] And he settled his countenance stedfastly, until he was ashamed: and the man of God wept.

With a fixed gaze Elisha stared at Hazael perhaps hoping to embarrass him out of the deed. Hazael, secretly glad at the news of Ben-Hadad’s fate, could not help feeling ashamed because Elisha seemed to read his mind. God’s revelation to His prophet of what Hazael would do to Israel brought tears to Elisha’s eyes and he began to weep.

- 12] And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child.
- 13] And Hazael said, But what, *is* thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The LORD hath shewed me that thou *shalt be* king over Syria.

Hazael pretended to be offended at the very suggestion of such cruelty. He feigned humility by calling himself a mere dog, incapable of such a feat. Elisha then explained that Hazael would become king of Aram; God had revealed this to the prophet.

- 14] So he departed from Elisha, and came to his master; who said to him, What said Elisha to thee? And he answered, He told me *that* thou shouldst surely recover.
- 15] And it came to pass on the morrow, that he took a thick cloth, and dipped *it* in water, and spread *it* on his face, so that he died: and Hazael reigned in his stead.

Rather than waiting for the Lord to arrange his accession to the throne through natural processes, as David had done, Hazael decided to seize the crown. So the next day he suffocated his master in a manner that made it look as if Ben-Hadad had died of natural causes. As Elisha had predicted Hazael was elevated to the throne (cf. v. 13). Elijah may have previously anointed Hazael as king (1 Kings 19:15) or the event just reported may have constituted that act with Elisha carrying out Elijah’s assignment. Hazael’s cruel domination of Israel was part of God’s discipline of His people for their idolatry.

Hazael did not come from noble stock; on one Assyrian record Shalmaneser III called him “the son of a nobody”¹. Hazael reigned as king of Aram from 841 to 801 B.C. during the reigns of Jehoram, Jehu, and Jehoahaz in Israel, and Ahaziah, Athaliah, and Joash in Judah.

Jehoram’s Evil Reign in Judah

The scene shifts once again to the *Southern* Kingdom of Judah as the writer continues his narrative with Jehoshaphat’s son Jehoram.

- 16] And in the fifth year of Jehoram the son of Ahab king of Israel, Jehoshaphat *being* then king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah began to reign.

(Some Bible versions label one of these “Joram” to help keep them separate; but the names are both from the same Hebrew derivation.)

- 17] Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem.

Jehoshaphat appointed Jehoram his coregent the year he went off to battle with Ahab at Ramoth Gilead (853 B.C.). He may have thought he would be involved in wars out of the country for many months. Jehoram evidently remained in Jerusalem to run the nation. The 18th year of Jehoshaphat’s sole reign in Judah (852) when Ahab’s son Jehoram began to rule in Israel (3:1) was the second year of Jehoram’s coregency with Jehoshaphat (1:17). The fifth year of Jehoram of Israel was the year Jehoram began his reign in Judah alone (848 B.C.). The length of Jehoram’s reign, including his coregency was 13 years (853-841) while his sole reign was 8 years (848-841).

- 18] And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab: for the daughter of Ahab was his wife: and he did evil in the sight of the LORD.

Unfortunately Jehoram’s godly father had less of an influence on him than his ungodly wife did. The daughter of Ahab, whom Jehoram married as part of Jehoshaphat’s treaty with Ahab, was Athaliah. Jehoram was one of Judah’s evil kings. But because of God’s covenant with David (2 Sam 7), He did not cut off the Davidic dynasty or destroy the Judean nation. 2 Kings mentions only two of the unfortunate events that marked the reign of Jehoram. One not included was his slaughter of six of his brothers, all sons of Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 21:2-4). This purge seems to have been mother Athaliah’s idea since no other Judean king practiced such a thing, but Athaliah herself did later when she ruled (2 Kgs 11:1).

- 19] Yet the LORD would not destroy Judah for David his servant’s sake, as he promised him to give him always a light, *and* to his children.
- 20] In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves.

Edom had come under Judah’s control when Jehoshaphat had defeated a coalition of kingdoms that included Edom (2 Chr 20:1-29). At that time

an Edomite deputy may have been placed on the throne in place of an Edomite king (1 Kgs 22:47). Edom had helped Israel and Judah in their campaign against King Mesha of Moab (2 Kgs 3:4-27). But in Jehoram's day Edom rebelled and set up its own king.

- 21] So Jehoram went over to Zair, and all the chariots with him: and he rose by night, and smote the Edomites which compassed him about, and the captains of the chariots: and the people fled into their tents.
- 22] Yet Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day. Then Libnah revolted at the same time.

Jehoram took his army to Zair (probably Seir, another name for Edom) to put down the rebellion, but he was unsuccessful and barely escaped with his life. His army retreated back home. Libnah was located southwest of Jerusalem near the border of Philistia. Its rebellion seems to have been precipitated by Philistine influence (cf. 2 Chr 21:16). The Philistines invaded Judah in Jehoram's day and Judah suffered heavy losses at their hands (2 Chr 21:16-17). The Arabians also rebelled. Both Philistia and Arabia had feared and paid tribute to Jehoram's father (2 Chr 17:11). Obviously Judah was weaker under Jehoram, partly because of his wickedness.

- 23] And the rest of the acts of Jehoram, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?
- 24] And Jehoram slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David: and Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead.

Jehoram died of a painful disease of the intestines (2 Chr 21:18-19). Jehoram had been warned by Elijah early in his reign because of his wickedness (2 Chr 21:12-15), but he did not change his ways and died as Elijah had prophesied.

Ahaziah's Evil Reign in Judah

Most of what is recorded about Ahaziah's brief reign in Judah concerned the activities of Jehu in the north.

- 25] In the twelfth year of Jehoram the son of Ahab king of Israel did Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah begin to reign.
- 26] Two and twenty years old *was* Ahaziah when he began to reign; and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. And his mother's name *was* Athaliah, the daughter of Omri king of Israel.

Ahaziah of Israel should not be confused with Ahaziah of Judah; they were two different kings. Each ruled only one year and their reigns did not coincide. Ahaziah of Judah reigned during the last year of Jehoram king of Israel (841 B.C.). His reign commenced while he was 22 years old when his

father Jehoram died. His mother was Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, and *granddaughter* of Omri. (Did you know that a *queen* once ruled in *Judah*! We'll speak more of this evil daughter of Jezebel later)

- 27] And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did evil in the sight of the LORD, as *did* the house of Ahab: for he *was* the son in law of the house of Ahab.

Influenced by his evil mother (2 Chr 22:3) he followed the wicked ways of his ancestors in the Northern Kingdom.

- 28] And he went with Jehoram the son of Ahab to the war against Hazael king of Syria in Ramothgilead; and the Syrians wounded Jehoram.
- 29] And king Jehoram went back to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria. And Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Jehoram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick.

Israel and Judah were still allied in Ahaziah's day. That is why he joined his uncle Jehoram in battle against Hazael king of Aram at Ramoth Gilead. Jehoram was wounded in this battle and returned to Jezreel (cf. 1 Kgs 21:1), probably where his winter palace was located, to recover (cf. 2 Kgs 9:14-15). Ahaziah went down from Jerusalem to visit him there.

2 Kings 9 Jehu's Rise

Elijah and Elisha were God's instruments to warn Ahab and many of his relatives of the consequences of apostasy. Jehu was God's instrument to judge that dynasty when the kings failed to repent.

- 1] And Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, Gird up thy loins, and take this box of oil in thine hand, and go to Ramothgilead:

Elijah had been commissioned by God to anoint Jehu king over Israel (1 Kgs 19:16). This assignment fell to his successor Elisha who delegated it to one of the young prophets under his tutelage. Tucking one's long cloak into his belt (cf. 2 Kgs 4:29) enabled a person to move swiftly. The flask held the oil the young man would use to anoint Jehu who was still in Ramoth Gilead on the east side of the Jordan after the battle there (cf. 8:28-29).

- 2] And when thou comest thither, look out there Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi, and go in, and make him arise up from among his brethren, and carry him to an inner chamber;
- 3] Then take the box of oil, and pour *it* on his head, and say, Thus saith the LORD, I have anointed thee king over Israel. Then open the door, and flee, and tarry not.

Pouring the oil on the head was a symbolic way of illustrating the coming of the Spirit of God on a man to enable him to function as king (cf. 1 Sam 16:13). An announcement of God's will for the king accompanied the ritual. The words are related briefly here (2 Kgs 9:3) but more fully later (vv. 6-10).

- 4] So the young man, *even* the young man the prophet, went to Ramothgilead.
5] And when he came, behold, the captains of the host *were* sitting; and he said, I have an errand to thee, O captain. And Jehu said, Unto which of all us? And he said, To thee, O captain.
6] And he arose, and went into the house; and he poured the oil on his head, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I have anointed thee king over the people of the LORD, *even* over Israel.
7] And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD, at the hand of Jezebel.

The prophet anointed Jehu and explained the purpose for which God had chosen him. Jehu was to destroy Ahab's dynasty. This would avenge the blood of the Lord's prophets and servants which had been shed as a result of Jezebel's influence.

- 8] For the whole house of Ahab shall perish: and I will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel:
9] And I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah:

God would thoroughly annihilate Ahab's line as Elijah had prophesied (1 Kgs 21:21-22, 29), and Jezebel would also die as Elijah had foretold (1 Kgs 21:23). Jeroboam's dynasty and Baasha's dynasty had ended violently (cf. 1 Kgs 15:25, 28-29; 16:3-4) and so would Ahab's.

- 10] And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel, and *there shall be* none to bury *her*. And he opened the door, and fled.

Jezebel, the young prophet said, would be eaten by dogs, and not be buried; both facts were ignominious to Semites. The young prophet's mission completed, he ran away from Jehu and friends as Elisha had told him to do (2 Kgs 9:3). Perhaps this was in view of the coup that would soon begin and the accompanying recriminations that often trap innocent victims.

- 11] Then Jehu came forth to the servants of his lord: and *one* said unto him, *Is* all well? wherefore came this mad *fellow* to thee? And he said unto them, Ye know the man, and his communication.

The officer's calling the prophet a madman probably refers to the prophet's behavior in running away so quickly. Jehu tried to change the

subject when his friends asked him what the prophet had said. He implied that his companions knew the prophet was a little odd. Perhaps the young man's clothing identified him as a prophet.

- 12] And they said, *It is* false; tell us now. And he said, Thus and thus spake he to me, saying, Thus saith the LORD, I have anointed thee king over Israel.

Jehu's friends would not be put off, however. Sensing that the prophet's mission was important, they wanted to know what had happened. So Jehu explained that the prophet had anointed him king over Israel.

- 13] Then they hasted, and took every man his garment, and put *it* under him on the top of the stairs, and blew with trumpets, saying, Jehu is king.

Immediately the officers arranged a little ceremony (cf. 1 Kgs 16:16). They spread their cloaks under him on the bare steps blew the trumpet, and shouted, Jehu is king! These were customary rituals for announcing a king (cf. 2 Sam 15:10; 1 Kgs 1:34, 39; Mt 21:7-9).

- 14] So Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi conspired against Jehoram. (Now Jehoram had kept Ramothgilead, he and all Israel, because of Hazael king of Syria.

Jehu's father Jehoshaphat was not the king of Judah by the same name. Jehu proceeded with plans to carry out God's will against the house of Ahab. Israel had regained Ramoth in Gilead from the Arameans since Ahab had been defeated there by Ben-Hadad II (1 Kgs 22:29-40).

- 15] But king Jehoram was returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him, when he fought with Hazael king of Syria.) And Jehu said, If it be your minds, *then* let none go forth *nor* escape out of the city to go to tell *it* in Jezreel.

While defending it from Aramean aggressors under Hazael's command, King Jehoram had been wounded. He had returned to Jezreel to recuperate. Jehu made his statement in the context of his being proclaimed king.

- 16] So Jehu rode in a chariot, and went to Jezreel; for Jehoram lay there. And Ahaziah king of Judah was come down to see Jehoram.

He wanted to arrive in Jezreel and execute Jehoram before the king had heard of Jehu's being hailed as king by his men and before Jehoram could prepare to defend himself.

- 17] And there stood a watchman on the tower in Jezreel, and he spied the company of Jehu as he came, and said, I see a company. And Jehoram said, Take an horseman, and send to meet them, and let him say, *Is it* peace?

A lookout spotted Jehu's troops coming long before he could identify them as Jehu's. He probably saw a cloud of dust on the horizon and concluded that many horsemen were approaching. Fearful that these might be Arameans or bad news from Ramoth, Jehoram ordered a horseman to go intercept the convoy and find out who they were.

18] So there went one on horseback to meet him, and said, Thus saith the king, *Is it peace?* And Jehu said, What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me. And the watchman told, saying, The messenger came to them, but he cometh not again.

The horseman met Jehu and posed his question. Jehu's reply was conciliatory. What do you have to do with peace? means "Do not worry about the situation." Jehu told the messenger to follow him to Jezreel.

19] Then he sent out a second on horseback, which came to them, and said, Thus saith the king, *Is it peace?* And Jehu answered, What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me.

20] And the watchman told, saying, He came even unto them, and cometh not again: and the driving *is* like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi; for he driveth furiously.

As the troops drew closer to Jezreel the lookout observed that the officer leading the convoy was driving his chariot very fast, like a madman: "furiously" = שִׁגְגָּה *shigga`own*: madness (cf. "madman" in v. 11). This was Jehu's characteristic style (obviously a Californian) and it identified him to the scout on the tower. Jehu was the descendant but not the direct son of Nimshi (cf. v. 14).

21] And Jehoram said, Make ready. And his chariot was made ready. And Jehoram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah went out, each in his chariot, and they went out against Jehu, and met him in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite.

Thinking that Jehu brought bad news of the fighting at Ramoth Gilead (the messengers would have hurried back to Jezreel if their news had been good), Jehoram prepared to ride out to meet Jehu and get the news himself as quickly as possible. He suspected no rebellion but was so concerned about the war that he did this in spite of his injuries. Ahaziah, his guest, joined his uncle in his own chariot. Ironically, they met Jehu at the very plot of ground that had belonged to Naboth (1 Kgs 21)!

22] And it came to pass, when Jehoram saw Jehu, that he said, *Is it peace, Jehu?* And he answered, What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts *are so many?*

Jehoram's question (Have you come in peace, Jehu?) meant, "Is there peace at Ramoth?" As yet the king had no inkling of Jehu's plans. Jehu's reply, however, revealed that he was returning to Jezreel as Jehoram's adversary.

He gave a different meaning to the word peace: It was Jezebel's idolatry and witchcraft that had ruined Israel's *peace with God* and for which Jehu was setting himself against her son (cf. Ex 22:18; Deut 18:10-12). "Witchcraft" translates כְּשָׁפִים *kesheph* (lit., "sorceries"), which is used in the Old Testament only here and in Isa 47:9, 12; Mic 5:12; Nah 3:4. It suggests seeking information from demonic forces. No wonder Jezebel's influence in Israel was so devastating!

23] And Jehoram turned his hands, and fled, and said to Ahaziah, *There is treachery, O Ahaziah.*

24] And Jehu drew a bow with his full strength, and smote Jehoram between his arms, and the arrow went out at his heart, and he sunk down in his chariot.

25] Then said *Jehu* to Bidkar his captain, Take up, *and* cast him in the portion of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite: for remember how that, when I and thou rode together after Ahab his father, the LORD laid this burden upon him;

26] Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons, saith the LORD; and I will requite thee in this plat, saith the LORD. Now therefore take *and* cast him into the plat of ground, according to the word of the LORD.

They were fulfilling that prediction. Jehu's free quotation added a fact not revealed previously: Jezebel had also had Naboth's sons killed. Jehu was careful to obey and to fulfill the Lord's word, thus ending Israel's 4th royal dynasty.

27] But when Ahaziah the king of Judah saw *this*, he fled by the way of the garden house. And Jehu followed after him, and said, Smite him also in the chariot. *And they did so* at the going up to Gur, which *is* by Ibleam. And he fled to Megiddo, and died there.

The two accounts of Ahaziah's fate (2 Kgs 9:27-29; 2 Chr 22:9) seem contradictory, but they can be harmonized. Evidently Ahaziah fled from Jezreel south by way of Beth Haggan. Jehu and his men pursued him and wounded him near Ibleam. Apparently Ahaziah reached Samaria where he hid for some time (2 Chr 22:9). Jehu's men sought him, found him, and brought him to Jehu probably in Jezreel. Jehu may have wounded him again there. Then Ahaziah escaped and fled west to Megiddo where he died.

28] And his servants carried him in a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him in his sepulchre with his fathers in the city of David.

29] And in the eleventh year of Jehoram the son of Ahab began Ahaziah to reign over Judah.

The 11th year of Jehoram was 841 B.C. Since Jehu's coronation before the whole nation is not recorded, his reign may be regarded as beginning when Jehoram died (in 841 B.C.).

30] And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard *of it*; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window.

By the time Jehu returned to Jezreel Jezebel had learned of her son's death. Hearing of Jehu's return she painted her eyes and arranged her hair. [Evidently she anticipated her fate, and wanted to present an imposing appearance to Jehu and to die as a queen.]

31] And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, *Had* Zimri peace, who slew his master?

She called out to Jehu and he entered the city gate beneath her window. Her words were sarcastic; she was arrogant to the end of her life. Perhaps she sought to shame Jehu by asking if he came in peace (cf. vv. 18-19). Obviously he had not. Zimri, of course, also rebelled against his master, Elah (1 Kgs 16:9), and he himself died only seven days later by the influence of Omri, the founder of Ahab's dynasty (1 Kgs 16:18-19). Jezebel implied that Jehu's rebellion would destroy him as Zimri's had. This implication is clearer in another translation of Jezebel's words: "Did Zimri have peace, who murdered his master?" (Cf. NIV marg.)

32] And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, Who *is* on my side? who? And there looked out to him two *or* three eunuchs.

33] And he said, Throw her down. So they threw her down: and *some* of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses: and he trode her under foot.

Jezebel's household was not loyal to her. Several eunuchs who waited on the queen were willing to help Jehu and pitched their mistress out her window at Jehu's command. Probably the window was on a second story or higher. When Jezebel hit the ground her blood splattered the wall (evidently the city wall; cf. 1 Kgs 21:23) and Jehu's horses.

34] And when he was come in, he did eat and drink, and said, Go, see now this cursed *woman*, and bury her: for she *is* a king's daughter.

35] And they went to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of *her* hands.

Evidently at first Jehu did not remember Elijah's prophecy about Jezebel's fate. He later ordered that she be buried since she was a king's daughter (1 Kgs 16:31) though she was also a cursed woman—cursed by God for her wickedness. By the time Jehu's gravediggers arrived on the scene, the wild dogs had already torn her corpse apart and had carried off all but the skull, feet, and hands.

36] Wherefore they came again, and told him. And he said, This *is* the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel:

When they reported this to Jehu he remembered Elijah's prophecy (1 Kgs 21:23). Ironically she who had caused Naboth and his sons to die *undeservedly* now died an ignominious death—*deservedly*—on the very ground that had been Naboth's vineyard. This was part of the same plot of ground where Bidkar had thrown the corpse of her son Jehoram (2 Kgs 9:25-26).

37] And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel; *so* that they shall not say, This *is* Jezebel.

Jehu's commentary on the prophecy is in harmony with Elijah's words. The king's complete lack of respect for Jezebel in her death reflects how he and God, as well as the godly in Israel, viewed this callous sinner who had been both directly and indirectly responsible for so much apostasy and wickedness among God's people.

2 Kings 10

1] And Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. And Jehu wrote letters, and sent to Samaria, unto the rulers of Jezreel, to the elders, and to them that brought up Ahab's *children*, saying,

Seventy sons (i.e., descendants) of Ahab and his ancestors lived in Samaria, the capital of Israel. Jehu, planning to execute every relative who could possibly succeed Ahab, wrote letters to the chief administrators of Israel who were not Ahab's relatives. These included the officials of Jezreel (possibly those responsible for the winter palace in Jezreel; cf. 1 Kgs 12:1; 2 Kgs 8:29), elders of Samaria, and others who had been assigned by Ahab to guard the young male members of the royal family and to rear them properly (cf. 10:6).

2] Now as soon as this letter cometh to you, seeing your master's sons *are* with you, and *there are* with you chariots and horses, a fenced city also, and armour;

3] Look even out the best and meetest of your master's sons, and set *him* on his father's throne, and fight for your master's house.

Jehu proposed that these leaders, whom he assumed would remain loyal to Ahab's dynasty and oppose himself, select a new king from Ahab's sons. Jehu challenged them to have this new king and his city fight him. Rather than fielding large armies, ancient Near Eastern leaders proposed that only two individuals join battle and so decide which family would rule (cf. 1 Sam 17:8-9; 2 Sam 2:9). This may have been what Jehu was suggesting, or he may have intended to go to war against the whole house of Ahab and the city of Samaria.

- 4] But they were exceedingly afraid, and said, Behold, two kings stood not before him: how then shall we stand?
- 5] And he that *was* over the house, and he that *was* over the city, the elders also, and the bringers up *of the children*, sent to Jehu, saying, *We are* thy servants, and will do all that thou shalt bid us; we will not make any king: do thou *that which is* good in thine eyes.

In either case the officials, elders, and guardians were terrified. They knew Jehu would win such a contest; he was a powerful and successful army commander who had already killed two kings, Jehoram (9:24-26) and Ahaziah (9:27). Being state officials with no personal connections to the Omride dynasty, they decided to transfer their allegiance to Jehu. They said they would do anything he told them to do.

- 6] Then he wrote a letter the second time to them, saying, If ye *be* mine, and if ye will hearken unto my voice, take ye the heads of the men your master's sons, and come to me to Jezreel by to morrow this time. Now the king's sons, *being* seventy persons, *were* with the great men of the city, which brought them up.
- 7] And it came to pass, when the letter came to them, that they took the king's sons, and slew seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent him *them* to Jezreel.
- 8] And there came a messenger, and told him, saying, They have brought the heads of the king's sons. And he said, Lay ye them in two heaps at the entering in of the gate until the morning.

When the heads of the royal princes had been collected Jehu had them put in two piles at the entrance of the gate of Jezreel where they remained overnight. The practice of piling the heads of conquered subjects at the city gate was an effective way of demonstrating subjugation.

- 9] And it came to pass in the morning, that he went out, and stood, and said to all the people, Ye *be* righteous: behold, I conspired against my master, and slew him: but who slew all these?

In the morning Jehu assembled the people of Jezreel at the city gate. He relieved them of any responsibility for the death of King Jehoram (my master) by admitting that he alone was responsible. This statement would have given Jehu a psychological advantage with the people; he was confessing to them and was not implicating them in his act. This was all a part of Jehu's strategy which then became clear. He claimed innocence of and implied ignorance of the execution of Ahab's sons. This had been done by Ahab's chief officials but Jehu did not tell the people it had been done at *his* command.

- 10] Know now that there shall fall unto the earth nothing of the word of the LORD, which the LORD spake concerning the house of Ahab: for the LORD hath done *that* which he spake by his servant Elijah.

Since he had been honest with the people about his own responsibility in killing Jehoram, the people assumed he was being honest with them about his innocence in this mass murder. Jehu further ingratiated himself with the people by identifying himself with God and His prophet, claiming (rightly so) to be the fulfiller of Elijah's prophecy that Ahab's house (dynasty) would be destroyed. In this way Jehu gained popular support for his plot to massacre the officials of Samaria who had murdered Ahab's sons (cf. 2 Sam 1:14-15).

- 11] So Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kinsfolks, and his priests, until he left him none remaining.

Jehu wiped out Ahab's heirs in Samaria and Jezreel, which God approved. But he also executed all Ahab's chiefmen (officials, v. 1), close friends, and priests, which God did not approve and for which God judged Jehu's own dynasty later (cf. Hos 1:4). Jehu got carried away in his zeal and killed many innocent people who could have helped him be a more effective king than he proved to be.

- 12] And he arose and departed, and came to Samaria. *And* as he *was* at the shearing house in the way,
- 13] Jehu met with the brethren of Ahaziah king of Judah, and said, Who *are* ye? And they answered, *We are* the brethren of Ahaziah; and we go down to salute the children of the king and the children of the queen.

Traveling south from Jezreel toward Samaria Jehu and his men met a party of 42 men on the road. He learned that they were relatives of Ahaziah, king of Judah who were going from Jerusalem to visit other relatives of the king including the queen mother, Jezebel. Obviously they had not heard of Jehu's coup.

- 14] And he said, Take them alive. And they took them alive, and slew them at the pit of the shearing house, *even* two and forty men; neither left he any of them.

Jehu seized them at once since they were part of the house of Ahab and executed them near a well, leaving no survivor. Not all 42 travelers were necessarily blood relatives of Ahab; some may have been related by marriage. But that would not have mattered to Jehu (cf. v. 11). In 2 Chr 22:8 they are called "princes of Judah" and "the sons of Ahaziah's relatives, who had been attending Ahaziah."

- 15] And when he was departed thence, he lighted on Jehonadab the son of Rechab *coming* to meet him: and he saluted him, and said to him, Is thine heart right, as my heart *is* with thy heart? And Jehonadab answered, It is. If it be, give *me* thine hand. And he gave *him* his hand; and he took him up to him into the chariot.

Continuing his journey, Jehu met Jehonadab son of Recab. This man was a faithful follower of the Lord and a strict observer of the Mosaic Law (cf. Jer 35:6-7, where his name is spelled Jonadab). He was on his way to meet Jehu. Meeting Jehonadab, Jehu learned that he was a supporter of his policy to purge the land of Ahab's apostate influence. Joining hands and sharing a chariot were signs of agreement and mutual commitment.

- 16] And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD. So they made him ride in his chariot.
- 17] And when he came to Samaria, he slew all that remained unto Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed him, according to the saying of the LORD, which he spake to Elijah.
- 18] And Jehu gathered all the people together, and said unto them, Ahab served Baal a little; *but* Jehu shall serve him much.
- 19] Now therefore call unto me all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests; let none be wanting: for I have a great sacrifice *to do* to Baal; whosoever shall be wanting, he shall not live. But Jehu did *it* in subtilty, to the intent that he might destroy the worshippers of Baal.
- 20] And Jehu said, Proclaim a solemn assembly for Baal. And they proclaimed *it*.
- 21] And Jehu sent through all Israel: and all the worshippers of Baal came, so that there was not a man left that came not. And they came into the house of Baal; and the house of Baal was full from one end to another.

It was to take place at the central temple of Baal that Ahab had built in Samaria (1 Kgs 16:32). Every leader of the Baal cult was required to attend. Obviously Jehu's true religious preferences had not yet become known in Israel.

- 22] And he said unto him that *was* over the vestry, Bring forth vestments for all the worshippers of Baal. And he brought them forth vestments.
- 23] And Jehu went, and Jehonadab the son of Rechab, into the house of Baal, and said unto the worshippers of Baal, Search, and look that there be here with you none of the servants of the LORD, but the worshippers of Baal only.
- 24] And when they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings, Jehu appointed fourscore men without, and said, *If* any of the men whom I have brought into your hands escape, *he that letteth him go*, his life *shall be* for the life of him.

Presumably Jehu did not personally participate in the sacrifices and burnt offerings of the priests of Baal; to have done so would have undermined his attempts to win the support of the faithful in Israel.

- 25] And it came to pass, as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, that Jehu said to the guard and to the captains, Go in, *and* slay them; let none come forth. And they smote them with the edge of the sword; and the guard and the captains cast *them* out, and went to the city of the house of Baal.

However, he did offer a burnt offering, perhaps to set a trap for the priests of Baal. Jehu then ordered his guards and officers (80 of them) to enter the temple and slaughter all Baal ministers.

- 26] And they brought forth the images out of the house of Baal, and burned them.
- 27] And they brake down the image of Baal, and brake down the house of Baal, and made it a draught house unto this day.

Then they brought out the sacred stone burned it, probably to dishonor it, and then demolished it. However, perhaps two stones were involved, because two different Hebrew words are used for the stones in verses 26 and 27. If the first "stone" was actually a wooden idol, then the second "stone" was the main image of Baal, probably a conical stone dedicated to Baal.

- 28] Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel.
- 29] Howbeit *from* the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, *to wit*, the golden calves that *were* in Bethel, and that *were* in Dan.
- 30] And the LORD said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing *that which is* right in mine eyes, *and* hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that *was* in mine heart, thy children of the fourth *generation* shall sit on the throne of Israel.

Because he obeyed the Lord in the matter of judging Ahab's dynasty, God promised Jehu that four generations of his descendants would reign as kings over Israel. These were Jehoahaz, Jehoash (Joash), Jeroboam II, and Zechariah.

- 31] But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin.

No doubt God's blessing would have been greater if Jehu's heart had been more completely devoted to Him. But he did become the head of Israel's 5th royal dynasty.

- 32] In those days the LORD began to cut Israel short: and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel;
- 33] From Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, which *is* by the river Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan.

Jehu's reign was characterized by turmoil and unrest. He was not a strong ruler. Social and economic abuses marked his administration. Both the Arameans and the Assyrians humiliated Israel during his leadership. Hazael, king of Aram, seized all of Transjordan from Israel and later even made inroads into Israel's territory west of the Jordan (cf. 12:17-18; 13:7). Before Hazael's attacks, Assyria under Shalmaneser III had forced Jehu to bow before him and pay tribute.

(A bas relief on Shalmaneser's so-called "Black Obelisk" shows Jehu doing this. This is the only picture of an Israelite king that has been found so far.)

- 34] Now the rest of the acts of Jehu, and all that he did, and all his might, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?
- 35] And Jehu slept with his fathers: and they buried him in Samaria. And Jehoahaz his son reigned in his stead.
- 36] And the time that Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria *was* twenty and eight years.

The alliance that had united and provided some strength for both Judah and Israel was broken when Jehu killed Judah's king Ahaziah. Israel's treaty with Phoenicia also ended when Jehu killed Jehoram, Jezebel, and the prophets of Baal. This is how God began to reduce the size of Israel in Jehu's reign. In all Jehu reigned 28 years (841-814 B.C.).

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) What are the lesson(s) from the preservation of the Shunammite woman?
- 2) How was Hazael's seizure of the throne premature? In what way was Hazael's tenure part of God's plan? Why?
- 3) Compare the reigns of Jehoram and Ahaziah in Judah. Contrast them with the similar names in Israel.
- 4) List the violent acts of Jehu and their ostensible purposes.
- 5) List the prophecies that were fulfilled in this session.
- 6) What additional insights did this session yield about the episode of Naboth's vineyard?
- 7) Outline the political and international situation in Elisha's time as background for his miracles and ministry.

Discussion Questions

("Where two people agree, one is redundant.")

- 1) Discuss the direct and indirect implications of the Ahab and Jezebel on both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.
- 2) What was Jehu's strengths and weaknesses?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Research the genealogical background of Athaliah and her relationships with both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.

Preparation for Next Session:

Read 2 Kings 11 - 13. Also, 2 Chronicles 21 - 23.

Notes:

1. David Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, 2 vols, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1926-1927, 1:246.

Session 4 2 Kings 11 - 13

Athaliah's evil reign in Judah (11:1-20); Joash's good reign in Judah (11:21-12:21); Jehoahaz's evil reign in Israel (13:1-9); Jehoash's evil reign in Israel (13:10-25).

2 Kings 11 Athaliah's Evil Reign in Judah

Athaliah usurped the throne of Judah. She was Judah's only reigning queen and the strongest Baal advocate among Judah's rulers.

Summary: Athaliah

Athaliah was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, grand-daughter of Omri, 6th king of Israel. In her childhood the political relations of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel had, after many years of strife, become friendly, and she was married to Jehoram, eldest son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah (2 Kgs 8:18). The marriage was one of political expediency, and is a blot on the memory of Jehoshaphat. It was a union (compare 1 Cor 15:33; 6:14-18) fatal to the cause of piety in Judah, a cause which the godly Jehoshaphat had so much at heart.

Athaliah as Queen

When Jehoram was 32 years of age, he succeeded to the throne, and Athaliah became queen of Judah. She inherited her mother's strength of will, and like her developed a fanatical devotion to the cult of the Zidonian Baal. Elijah's blow at the worship of Baal in Samaria shortly before her accession to power did nothing to mitigate her zeal. It probably intensified it. The first recorded act of Jehoram's reign is the murder of his six younger brothers; some princes of the realm, who were known to be favorable to the ancient faith of the nation, were also destroyed (2 Ch 21:4). There can be little doubt that these deeds of blood

were supported, and perhaps instigated, by Athaliah, who was a much stronger character than her husband.

Murder of Her Grandchildren

After eight years of royal life, Athaliah became a widow, and her son, Ahaziah, then 22 years of age (2 Kgs 8:26; not 42 as in 2 Chr 22:2), ascended his father's throne. As queen-mother, Athaliah was now supreme in the councils of the nation, as well as in the royal palace. Within a single year, the young king fell, and the only persons who stood between Athaliah and the throne were her grandchildren. It is in such moments that ambition, fired by fanaticism, sees its opportunity, and the massacre of the royal seed was determined on.

The same bloodthirstiness, lust of dominion over husband and over the state, and unscrupulous wickedness in killing all that stood in the way of ambition, appear in the daughter as in the mother. When her son Ahaziah was slain by Jehu, along with the brethren of Ahaziah and their sons (42 men), she arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah (2 Chr 22:10). As queenmother she was determined to keep the regal power which she exercised during Ahaziah's absence in Jezebel (2 Kgs 9:16). The massacre of the royal seed was carried out: but one of them, Jehoash, a babe, escaped by the intervention of his aunt, Jehosheba (1 Kgs 11:2; 2 Chr 22:11).

Her Usurpation

The palace being cleared of its royal occupants, Athaliah had herself proclaimed sovereign. No other woman, before or since, sat upon the throne of David, and it is a proof of her energy and ability that, in spite of her sex, she was able to keep it for six years. From 2 Chr 24:7 we gather that a portion of the temple of Yahweh was pulled down, and the material used in the structure of a temple of Baal.

The Counter-Revolution

The high priest at this time was Jehoiada, who had married the daughter of Athaliah, Jehosheba (2 Chr 22:11). His promotion to the primacy led to the undoing of the usurper, as Jehoiada proved staunchly, if secretly, true to the religion of Yahweh. For six years he and his wife concealed in their apartments, near the temple, Joash, the young child of Ahaziah. In the seventh year a counter-revolution was planned. The details are given with unusual fullness in both the Books of Kings and Chronicles, which supplement one another. Thus, when the Chronicler wrote, it had become

safe to give the names of five captains who led the military rising (2 Chr 23:1). [It is interesting to review the entire Bible as drama in which Satan attempts to thwart the plan of God: the Nephilim of Genesis 6 . . . to the slaughter of the babes in Bethlehem, et al. And, obviously, God always thwarts the Thwarters.]

Her Death

At the time of her deposition, Athaliah was resident in the royal palace. When roused to a sense of danger by the acclamations which greeted the coronation ceremony, she made an attempt to stay the revolt by rushing into the temple court, alone; her guards, according to Josephus,¹ having been prevented from following her. A glance sufficed. It revealed the lad standing on a raised platform before the temple, holding the Book of the Law in his hand, and with the crown upon his brow. Rending her robe and shouting, "Treason! Treason!" she fled. Some were for cutting her down as she did so, but this was objected to as defiling the temple with human blood. She was, therefore, allowed to reach the door of the palace in flight. Here she fell, smitten by the avenging guards. As she loved blood, blood was her own end; having lived as her mother, as her mother she died, slain at her own walls amidst the hoofs of the horses (compare Rev 16:5,6).

Athaliah's usurpation lasted for six years (2 Kgs 11:3; 12:1; 2 Chr 22:12). Her first year synchronizes with the first of Jehu in Israel, and may be placed at 846 B.C. (some put later).

- 1] And when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal.

Athaliah was the mother of the Judean king Ahaziah, whom Jehu had slain (9:27-29; 2 Chr 22:9) in 841 B.C. Athaliah was a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, and a sister of Ahaziah and Joram who had reigned successively in Israel after Ahab's death. She was the wife of King Jehoram of Judah who had died of an intestinal illness (2 Chr 21:18-19). Her other sons had all been killed by the raiding Philistines and Arabians (2 Chr 21:17). Now she saw the opportunity to seize the throne for herself. *So she proceeded to have all her grandsons killed in total disregard for God's will that the descendants of David should rule over Judah forever* (2 Sam 7:16).

- 2] But Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons *which were* slain; and they hid him, *even* him and his nurse, in the bedchamber from Athaliah, so that he was not slain.

Jehosheba, a daughter of Athaliah's husband King Jehoram (though perhaps not Athaliah's own daughter), was a sister of King Ahaziah of Judah. She took one of Ahaziah's sons, Joash, and hid him so that he was not put to death with the other children.

- 3] And he was with her hid in the house of the LORD six years. And Athaliah did reign over the land.

During Athaliah's six-year reign (841-835 B.C.) this aunt kept the prince safe by hiding him in the temple of the LORD where her husband, Jehoiada, served as high priest (2 Chr 22:11). Joash was a one-year-old when he was taken by Jehosheba because he was hidden for six years and then was made king at the age of seven (cf. 2 Kgs 11:21).

- 4] And the seventh year Jehoiada sent and fetched the rulers over hundreds, with the captains and the guard, and brought them to him into the house of the LORD, and made a covenant with them, and took an oath of them in the house of the LORD, and shewed them the king's son.

As Athaliah began the seventh year of her reign, Jehoiada the high priest assembled the military commanders at a certain level of authority (those commanding 100 soldiers each), the Carites (also called Kerethites [see comments on 2 Sam 8:18] and possibly Phoenician mercenaries who guarded the city), and the guards (lit., "runners," probably royal bodyguards) secretly in Solomon's temple. These were all loyalists who did not support the queen. He showed them little Joash, then seven years old (cf. 2 Kgs 11:21), to assure them that there was indeed a living legitimate heir to the throne.

- 5] And he commanded them, saying, This *is* the thing that ye shall do; A third part of you that enter in on the sabbath shall even be keepers of the watch of the king's house;
6] And a third part *shall be* at the gate of Sur; and a third part at the gate behind the guard: so shall ye keep the watch of the house, that it be not broken down.
7] And two parts of all you that go forth on the sabbath, even they shall keep the watch of the house of the LORD about the king.
8] And ye shall compass the king round about, every man with his weapons in his hand: and he that cometh within the ranges, let him be slain: and be ye with the king as he goeth out and as he cometh in.

The guards were to divide into three groups on the Sabbath, one group at the palace, another at the Sur Gate near the temple, and another group at the gate behind the guard through which opposition might come. The others, who were going off duty, were to guard the temple. A ceremony would take place at the changing of the guard on the Sabbath when the temple area would be busy, perhaps on a feast day.

The boy was to be fenced off by the soldiers and anyone who came near their ranks was to be killed. The soldiers were to guard Joash with their lives as he was conducted from the temple to his place of coronation in the temple courtyard.

- 9] And the captains over the hundreds did according to all *things* that Jehoiada the priest commanded: and they took every man his men that were to come in on the sabbath, with them that should go out on the sabbath, and came to Jehoiada the priest.
10] And to the captains over hundreds did the priest give king David's spears and shields, that *were* in the temple of the LORD.
11] And the guard stood, every man with his weapons in his hand, round about the king, from the right corner of the temple to the left corner of the temple, *along* by the altar and the temple.

Since the temple faced east the guards evidently made a semicircular arc in front of the building from its northeast to its southeast corners, creating a shielded area in the temple courtyard where the anointing would take place.

- 12] And he brought forth the king's son, and put the crown upon him, and *gave him* the testimony; and they made him king, and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said, God save the king.

Jehoiada then brought Joash out of the temple where he had been living into this protected area of the courtyard, placed the royal crown on his young head, presented him with a copy of the covenant (the Mosaic Law or a part of it; cf. Deut. 17:18-19), and proclaimed him king. At some time in the ceremony, probably near the beginning, the high priest also anointed Joash with oil, symbolizing enduement with divine power (cf. 2 Kgs 9:6). Undoubtedly Jehoiada had scheduled this coronation for a time when as many people as possible would witness it. When the king had been crowned the people raised a roar of approval, clapped and shouted, God save the king!

- 13] And when Athaliah heard the noise of the guard *and* of the people, she came to the people into the temple of the LORD.

The first that Athaliah knew of Jehoiada's plan was when she heard the noise of the celebration. She went from her palace to the temple to find out what was happening.

- 14] And when she looked, behold, the king stood by a pillar, as the manner *was*, and the princes and the trumpeters by the king, and all the people of the land rejoiced, and blew with trumpets: and Athaliah rent her clothes, and cried, Treason, Treason.

To her amazement, she saw little Joash (the king) with the royal crown on his head standing by the pillar at the eastern gate of the inner courtyard of the temple, the place the king customarily occupied when

he addressed the people in the temple area (cf. 2 Chr 23:13). An elevated platform was provided for the king to stand on when he visited the temple on festive occasions (cf. 2 Kgs 23:3; 2 Chr 6:13). This is where Joash stood. The queen immediately understood what was taking place, tore her robes signifying her great distress (cf. 2 Kgs 2:12; 5:7; 6:30), and cried, Treason! Treason!

- 15] But Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains of the hundreds, the officers of the host, and said unto them, Have her forth without the ranges: and him that followeth her kill with the sword. For the priest had said, Let her not be slain in the house of the LORD. What Jehoiada had done was not treasonous because Joash was a legitimate heir to the throne. Athaliah was not a legitimate heir since she was not a blood descendant of David. *She* was the one guilty of treason.

For this reason Jehoiada the priest ordered the commanders to arrest her, to lead her out of the temple area under guard, and to kill anyone who tried to help her. It was not appropriate to execute anyone in the temple area since it was a place of worship (cf. 2 Chr 24:20-22).

- 16] And they laid hands on her; and she went by the way by the which the horses came into the king's house: and there was she slain.

Athaliah was put to death with the sword at the place where the horses entered the palace grounds (the Horse Gate; cf. 2 Chr 23:15, not the Horse Gate into the city). So ended the life of one of the most wicked women in Scripture, a true daughter of Jezebel.

- 17] And Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD and the king and the people, that they should be the LORD'S people; between the king also and the people.

Jehoiada led the people in a rededication of themselves to the LORD and His covenant given through Moses (Deut 4:20; 27:9-10) from which they had departed since the days of Jehoshaphat. He also made a new covenant between the king and the people that the king would lead the people according to the Mosaic Law and the people would obey the king (cf. 2 Sam 5:3).

- 18] And all the people of the land went into the house of Baal, and brake it down; his altars and his images brake they in pieces thoroughly, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars. And the priest appointed officers over the house of the LORD.

The people then tore down the temple of Baal that had been built in Jerusalem and used by Athaliah to promote Baal worship in Judah. They also destroyed the altars and idols which this temple contained, and killed Mattan the chief priest of Baal in front of the altars. This showed deliberate

disrespect for the pagan worshipers' false belief that the temple area was a sacred place of sanctuary.

- 19] And he took the rulers over hundreds, and the captains, and the guard, and all the people of the land; and they brought down the king from the house of the LORD, and came by the way of the gate of the guard to the king's house. And he sat on the throne of the kings.

To avoid recriminations by the devotees of Baal, Jehoiada posted guards at Solomon's temple. At the end of the coronation ceremonies the people led by Jehoiada and his guards conducted the new king to his palace where he sat down on his throne.

- 20] And all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was in quiet: and they slew Athaliah with the sword *beside* the king's house.

The people of Judah as a whole rejoiced greatly that once again a descendant of David ruled and that the worship of Yahweh was again made official. The turmoil that had existed in Jerusalem during Athaliah's reign subsided and the city was quiet once again. (For more details on the reign of Athaliah, see 2 Chr 22:10-23:15.) As Jezebel had promoted Baalism in Israel, her daughter Athaliah had encouraged it in Judah. During Athaliah's reign as queen, Baalism gained its strongest foothold in the Southern Kingdom. However, it was never as influential in Judah as it was in Israel, because of the stronger commitment of some kings of Judah to the Lord.

- 21] Seven years old *was* Jehoash when he began to reign.

2 Kings 12

Joash's Good Reign in Judah

The beginning of Joash's reign marks the commencement of over 100 years of consecutive rule by four men who were all judged as good kings. None of these four—Joash, Amaziah, Azariah (Uzziah), and Jotham—was as good for Judah as Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, or Josiah, but together they did provide the longest continuous span of God-approved leadership in Judah's history.

- 1] In the seventh year of Jehu Jehoash began to reign; and forty years reigned he in Jerusalem. And his mother's name *was* Zibiah of Beersheba.

Joash was the youngest king to mount the throne of Judah; he was seven years old. His reign began in 835 B.C. and ended in 796 B.C., 40 years later. He was the son of King Ahaziah.

- 2] And Jehoash did *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him.

Joash did the Lord's will as long as his mentor Jehoiada the priest lived. But after Jehoiada died Joash turned away from following the Lord.

- 3] But the high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places.

During his years of faithfulness Joash ruled well, but he did not remove the high places (as was true of most kings of Judah), where the people made sacrifices and burned incense contrary to the Mosaic Law (cf. Deut 12:2-7, 13-14). These high places may have been regarded by Joash as relatively unimportant as they apparently were considered by his predecessors.

- 4] And Jehoash said to the priests, All the money of the dedicated things that is brought into the house of the LORD, *even* the money of every one that passeth *the account*, the money that every man is set at, *and* all the money that cometh into any man's heart to bring into the house of the LORD,

- 5] Let the priests take *it* to them, every man of his acquaintance: and let them repair the breaches of the house, wheresoever any breach shall be found.

Joash purposed to restore Solomon's temple which had fallen into disrepair and had suffered major damage during Athaliah's reign (cf. 2 Chr 24:7). This was the first temple restoration project recorded in 1 or 2 Kings.

- 6] But it was *so, that* in the three and twentieth year of king Jehoash the priests had not repaired the breaches of the house.

The king planned to use the money brought by the people in regular census offerings (Ex 30:11-16), vow offerings (Lev 27; Num 30), and free-will offerings. But this plan did not work. Apparently revenue from these regular sources was insufficient to support the priests and Levites and also to pay for the temple repairs.

- 7] Then king Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest, and the *other* priests, and said unto them, Why repair ye not the breaches of the house? now therefore receive *no more* money of your acquaintance, but deliver it for the breaches of the house.

- 8] And the priests consented to receive *no more* money of the people, neither to repair the breaches of the house.

Joash's impatience with the priests who were responsible for collecting the money (1 Kgs 12:7; 2 Chr 24:5) suggests that they may not have wanted to divert any funds from their own support. They had been using the money given them by the priestly treasurers for the regular expenses

of temple service, which was probably legitimate. So Joash told them to stop taking money from the offerings for this purpose since he was instituting a new procedure. Instead they were to hand over what would be collected in a new way to other men who would be responsible to supervise the renovations. The priests agreed to separate this project from the regular temple service and to let other men be responsible for it.

- 9] But Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one cometh into the house of the LORD: and the priests that kept the door put therein all the money *that was* brought into the house of the LORD.

At Joash's instructions Jehoiada bored a hole in the top of a large wooden chest and placed it on the north side of the altar of burnt offering in the temple courtyard. The priests then put into the chest all the money the people brought for the temple renovation project.

- 10] And it was *so*, when they saw that *there was* much money in the chest, that the king's scribe and the high priest came up, and they put up in bags, and told the money that was found in the house of the LORD.

- 11] And they gave the money, being told, into the hands of them that did the work, that had the oversight of the house of the LORD: and they laid it out to the carpenters and builders, that wrought upon the house of the LORD,

- 12] And to masons, and hewers of stone, and to buy timber and hewed stone to repair the breaches of the house of the LORD, and for all that was laid out for the house to repair *it*.

- 13] Howbeit there were not made for the house of the LORD bowls of silver, snuffers, basons, trumpets, any vessels of gold, or vessels of silver, of the money *that was* brought into the house of the LORD:

This money was not used for temple furnishings at first, but later the excess money received was used for that purpose (2 Chr 24:14).

- 14] But they gave that to the workmen, and repaired therewith the house of the LORD.

- 15] Moreover they reckoned not with the men, into whose hand they delivered the money to be bestowed on workmen: for they dealt faithfully.

- 16] The trespass money and sin money was not brought into the house of the LORD: it was the priests'.

The money received from the people as part of their guilt and sin offerings was used for the support of the priests, not for the temple building project. (See 2 Chr 24:4-14 for the parallel passage.) Several events transpired during the reign of Joash that are not recorded in 2 Kings but do appear in 2 Chronicles. Jehoiada the high priest died at the uncommonly advanced age of 130 years (2 Chr 24:15-16). After Jehoiada's voice was silenced Joash

2 Kings 13

Jehoahaz's Evil Reign in Israel

The scene shifts once again to the Northern Kingdom.

followed the counsel of certain Judean officials who advised him to do things that resulted in his turning from the Lord. When the king did this God sent prophets to warn the nation (2 Chr 24:17-19). Jehoiada's son, Zechariah, who had replaced his father as high priest, also sounded a prophetic warning. But Joash had him stoned to death for his rebuke (2 Chr 24:20-22).

17] Then Hazael king of Syria went up, and fought against Gath, and took it: and Hazael set his face to go up to Jerusalem.

Hazael king of Aram had defeated Israel during the reigns of Israel's kings Jehu and Jehoahaz (13:3, 22) and then pressed south along the coast into Judah. He captured Gath, the Philistine city that had been taken by Judah (cf. 2 Chr 11:8). Then he sent a contingent of soldiers against Jerusalem. This unit destroyed "all the leaders of the people" (2 Chr 24:3).

18] And Jehoash king of Judah took all the hallowed things that Jehoshaphat, and Jehoram, and Ahaziah, his fathers, kings of Judah, had dedicated, and his own hallowed things, and all the gold *that was* found in the treasures of the house of the LORD, and in the king's house, and sent *it* to Hazael king of Syria: and he went away from Jerusalem.

To buy Hazael off, Joash gave him all the sacred objects and gifts that his forefathers and he had dedicated to the Lord as well as all the gold in the temple and the palace treasuries (cf. 2 Chr 24:23). This ransom caused Hazael to withdraw his troops. The whole incident illustrates the weakness of Judah at this time which resulted from Joash's apostasy.

19] And the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

20] And his servants arose, and made a conspiracy, and slew Joash in the house of Mollo, which goeth down to Silla.

Several of his officials, conspiring against him because he had slain the high priest Zechariah (2 Chr 24:20-22), murdered Joash in his bed.

21] For Jozachar the son of Shimeath, and Jehozabad the son of Shomer, his servants, smote him, and he died; and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David: and Amaziah his son reigned in his stead.

The assassins were Jozabad and Jehozabad, whose mothers, according to 2 Chr 24:26, were an Ammonitess and a Moabitess, respectively. Joash was buried in the royal city (Jerusalem) but not in the royal tombs (cf. 2 Chr 24:25) because he was not as respected as some of his ancestors. His son Amaziah succeeded him as king.

1] In the three and twentieth year of Joash the son of Ahaziah king of Judah Jehoahaz the son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria, *and reigned* seventeen years.

Jehoahaz began reigning in the 23rd year of Joash's reign in Judah and reigned for 17 years (814-798 B.C.). (The 23rd year of Joash would seemingly mean Joash began reigning in 837. Actually he began in 835; different systems of dating began to be used in both Judah and Israel, thus making for a two-year deviation in the chronological system.) Jehoahaz was Jehu's son and his capital was Samaria.

2] And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD, and followed the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom.

3] And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he delivered them into the hand of Hazael king of Syria, and into the hand of Benhadad the son of Hazael, all *their* days.

Jehoahaz followed the sins of Jeroboam throughout his career (cf. Jehu, 2 Kgs 10:29). As discipline against Israel for her disobedience to the Mosaic Law, God allowed the Arameans to dominate her. Jehoahaz reigned during the last years of Hazael's administration and early years of his son Ben-Hadad III's reign.

4] And Jehoahaz besought the LORD, and the LORD hearkened unto him: for he saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them.

5] (And the LORD gave Israel a saviour, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians: and the children of Israel dwelt in their tents, as beforetime.

The LORD provided a deliverer was probably King Adad-nirari III of Assyria (811-783 B.C), who fought against Damascus (as well as against Tyre, Sidon, Media, Edom, and Egypt) and defeated it in 803 B.C. The Arameans consequently turned their attention from attacking Israel to defending themselves against the Assyrians. Thus Israel escaped Aram's power and the people were able to return to their homes and live in peace. Israel had to pay tribute to Assyria, but the nation was free from Aram's attacks.

6] Nevertheless they departed not from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, who made Israel sin, *but* walked therein: and there remained the grove also in Samaria.)

This answer to prayer did not result in the people repenting of their idolatry, however. Even the Asherah pole, a symbol of the pagan goddess Asherah, Baal's consort, remained conspicuously in Samaria.

- 7] Neither did he leave of the people to Jehoahaz but fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen; for the king of Syria had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by threshing.

Jehoahaz's army had been decimated by his wars with the Arameans, though some of the Israelite army was lost during the reign of Jehu (cf. comments on 10:32-36). Dust at threshing time was blown away and never seen again.

- 8] Now the rest of the acts of Jehoahaz, and all that he did, and his might, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?
9] And Jehoahaz slept with his fathers; and they buried him in Samaria: and Joash his son reigned in his stead.

Jehoash's Evil Reign in Israel

Jehoash was the third king of Jehu's dynasty to rule over Israel.

- 10] In the thirty and seventh year of Joash king of Judah began Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz to reign over Israel in Samaria, *and reigned* sixteen years.

When Jehoash (a variant of the Heb. Joash; cf. NIV marg.) took the reins of power in Israel a king by the name of Joash ruled in Judah. (The NIV translators have rendered the name of Israel's king Jehoash and that of Judah's king Joash consistently so these men are not so easily confused.)

- 11] And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD; he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin: *but* he walked therein.

Jehoash began reigning in Israel in 798 B.C. and served for a total of 16 years until 782 B.C. However, after five years (in 793 B.C.) Jehoash's son Jeroboam II began to reign as coregent with him. The king continued the religious policies of his predecessors and did evil in the eyes of the LORD.

- 12] And the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, and his might wherewith he fought against Amaziah king of Judah, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

The statement that normally concludes the writer's history of a particular king occurs here early in the story of Jehoash. These words about Jehoash are repeated almost verbatim in the history of Amaziah of Judah (14:15-16). Jehoash's war against Amaziah is described by the writer as a part of the Judean king's reign (14:8-14).

- 13] And Joash slept with his fathers; and Jeroboam sat upon his throne: and Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel.

Jeroboam II succeeded Jehoash, but the son actually began reigning as coregent 11 years before his father's death.

- 14] Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.

Elisha the prophet now reenters the narrative. He was suffering from a terminal illness. Out of respect for this man of God, King Jehoash paid him a visit. The fact that the king wept over him reveals that although Jehoash followed in the ways of Jeroboam I (v. 11) he also revered Yahweh. He anticipated the great loss that the death of this servant of God would be to Israel. He regarded Elisha as superior to himself, calling him "my father" in true humility. By the phrase the "chariots and horsemen of Israel," he showed that he recognized in Elisha, and behind him in the Lord, the real defense and power of Israel against all her adversaries. Elisha had used the same expressions himself when Elijah's ministry was terminated by God.

- 15] And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows.
16] And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow. And he put his hand *upon it*: and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands.

By taking the bow in his hands the king was symbolically becoming the agent of God's power. Elisha put his own hands on Jehoash's hands to symbolize that the power the king would exert came from the Lord through His prophet.

- 17] And he said, Open the window eastward. And he opened *it*. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the LORD'S deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed *them*.

Jehoash was to open an east window, which faced toward the enemy Aramean hosts at Aphek, so that he could shoot. Obeying the prophet, the king shot an arrow out the window toward Aram. By actually shooting the arrow the king was appropriating the victory symbolized by the arrow. As the king shot, Elisha said that the arrow represented victory over Aram at Aphek (cf. 1 Kgs 20:30) in the Transjordan.

- 18] And he said, Take the arrows. And he took *them*. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed.

Elisha then instructed the king to take the arrows that remained and to shoot them at the ground. (The Heb. which is translated "smite upon the ground")

probably means that the king was to shoot these arrows as he had shot the first one rather than to grasp them together in his hand and strike the ground with them.) The king fired off three more arrows and then stopped.

- 19] And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria *but* thrice.

Elisha was angry with him for stopping because the king was manifesting failure to trust God to give him as many victories as there were arrows. Jehoash understood what shooting the first arrow symbolized; Elisha had explained it. By letting the king shoot more arrows God was inviting him through Elisha to claim as many victories as he had arrows. God assured him that he would have victory by divine enablement. But perhaps Jehoash felt that God could not or would not do as much for him as Elisha implied. This unbelief explains why Elisha became angry. Jehoash had failed to trust God even though he knew what God had promised. The prophet told the king that had he shot more arrows God would have honored his faith and given him additional victories resulting in Aram's complete destruction. As it was he would now win only three victories (v. 25).

- 20] And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year.

Shortly thereafter Elisha died. Elisha's ministry spanned at least 56 years (including his years of serving as Elijah's servant) since he was called by Elijah during Ahab's reign (which ended in 853 B.C.) and Elisha died in Jehoash's reign (which began in 798 B.C.). The prophet was probably buried as most of the early Israelites were in a cave or tomb (v. 21) hewn out of a rock, after his body was wrapped in linen cloths.

- 21] And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band *of men*; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet.

Some time later some men were laying another man's body to rest near Elisha's tomb. They were surprised by a group of Moabite raiders who were apparently going to rob whomever they met. To flee quickly, the Israelite pallbearers removed the stone in front of Elisha's tomb, threw the corpse of their friend in the tomb, and retreated. When the new corpse touched Elisha's he came to life and stood up on his feet. Evidently the men who placed the body in Elisha's tomb observed this. Doubtless they told their story far and wide, and it probably reached the ears of Jehoash for whom this miracle seems to have been intended primarily. Such a sign of the power of God working even through His

prophet's corpse may have both encouraged the king as he anticipated his battles with the Arameans and rebuked him for his lack of faith .

- 22] But Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz.
23] And the LORD was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet.
24] So Hazael king of Syria died; and Benhadad his son reigned in his stead.
25] And Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz took again out of the hand of Benhadad the son of Hazael the cities, which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz his father by war. Three times did Joash beat him, and recovered the cities of Israel.

After Hazael died (801 B.C.) Jehoash engaged the new Aramean king, Ben-Hadad III in battle and defeated him three times, as prophesied by Elisha (v. 19). The battle of Aphek (v. 17), though not mentioned here, may have been one of the three battles. Jehoash recaptured the Israelite towns Jehoahaz had lost in battle to Hazael in these three encounters (cf. v. 3).

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) In what ways was Queen Athaliah like her mother?
- 2) Why did Jehoram murder his six brothers?
- 3) Why did Athaliah murder her grandchildren? How did God thwart her plans?
- 4) How did Joash come to power?
- 5) What were Joash's successes and failures?
- 6) What four kings gave the Southern Kingdom 100 consecutive years of "good" rule?
- 7) Name three other "good" kings in the Southern Kingdom.
- 8) Name any "good" kings in the Northern Kingdom.
- 9) How did Jehoash miss his opportunity?

Discussion Questions

("Where two people agree, one is redundant.")

- 1) Why did Jehoram marry Athaliah? Why did Jehoshaphat allow it? Discuss the effects of arranged or political marriages on human history.
- 2) Who is the real hero in this session?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Trace (and list) examples of how Satan attempted to thwart the plan of God, and how God thwarted the Thwarter.

Preparation for Next Session:

Read 2 Kings 14 - 16. Also 2 Chronicles 25-28; Isaiah 7; Jonah 1-4.

Notes:

1. Josephus, *Antiquities*, IX, vii, 3.

Session 5 2 Kings 14 - 16

Amaziah's good reign in Judah (14:1-22); Jeroboam II's evil reign in Israel (14:23-29); Azariah's good reign in Judah (15:1-7); Zechariah's evil reign in Israel (15:8-12); Shallum's evil reign in Israel (15:13-16); Menahem's evil reign in Israel (15:17-22); Pekahiah's evil reign in Israel (15:23-26) Pekah's evil reign in Israel (15:27-31); Jotham's good reign in Judah (15:32-38); Ahaz's evil reign in Judah (chap. 16).

Overview

The two major kings of Israel during the last half of its brief existence as a separate nation were Jehu and Jeroboam II. Their stories also provide the context for looking briefly at three prophets, whose ministries help us see the reason for the nation's fall: Jonah, Amos, and Hosea. When Jehu became king in Israel in 841 B.C., the Northern Kingdom had some 119 years left. Jehu wiped out the family of Ahab and purged the land of Baal worship. But Jehu continued to support the counterfeit religion established at the time of the division of the unified kingdom some 90 years before.

Plagued by a series of weak and evil kings, Israel knew a brief glory only in the time of Jeroboam II, who began his rule in 793 B.C. During the long decades, God did not desert His people Israel. He sent them suffering and defeat in an effort to turn them back to Him. And God sent Israel other prophets. In the days of Jeroboam II, three of the most powerful of the prophets—**Jonah and Amos and Hosea**—labored to turn Israel to the Lord. Their efforts were in vain. The people of Israel hurtled on in their rush toward judgment. When destruction of the kingdom finally did come,

and the Israelites were torn from the land by the Assyrians, the Scriptures make this sad comment:

They forsook all the commands of the Lord their God and made for themselves two idols cast in the shape of calves, and an Asherah pole. They bowed down to all the starry hosts, and they worshiped Baal. They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They practiced divination and sorcery and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, provoking Him to anger.

2 Kings 17:16-17

The people of the North would not turn from evil, so evil came. But let's first take a look at the situation in the Southern Kingdom:

2 Kings 14 Amaziah's Good Reign in Judah

- 1] In the second year of Joash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel reigned Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah.

Azariah means (He whose) *help is Jah*. His other name, *Uzziah*, means, "My strength is Jah."

- 2] He was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem.

Amaziah began to reign in Judah about a year after Jehoash had become king of Israel. Amaziah was fairly young, 25 years old, when he became king, and ruled a long time, 29 years (796-767 B.C.). Much of this time his son Azariah's reign overlapped with his own (790-767 B.C.).

- 3] And he did *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD, yet not like David his father: he did according to all things as Joash his father did.
- 4] Howbeit the high places were not taken away: as yet the people did sacrifice and burnt incense on the high places.

The king followed his father Joash's example; he upheld the worship of the LORD but did not remove the high places, where the people worshiped God in disobedience to the Mosaic Law (Deut 12:2-7, 13-14). These high places (*bamoth*) were elevations set aside for pagan worship. Each contained an altar featuring idols. Sometimes the Hebrews would set aside a high place for the worship of the Lord and would ordain local priests. This practice was in direct violation of Old Testament Law, which insisted on:

- 1) a single center for worship and sacrifice (Jerusalem, during the kingdom era) and
- 2) on a priesthood staffed by descendants of Aaron, Moses' brother.

The pagan associations of the high places were much too strong; worship there soon took on characteristics of occultism and immorality. Compared with David, the founder of his dynasty and Judah's greatest king, Amaziah fell short.

- 5] And it came to pass, as soon as the kingdom was confirmed in his hand, that he slew his servants which had slain the king his father.
- 6] But the children of the murderers he slew not: according unto that which is written in the book of the law of Moses, wherein the LORD commanded, saying, The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

In obedience to God's Law (Deut 24:16) Amaziah did not execute the children of his father's assassins as was customarily done by Near Eastern monarchs. He trusted God to control these potential rebels. *Note:* The citation from the law of Moses is evidence that Deuteronomy is not a late composition, as the higher critics hold.

- 7] He slew of Edom in the valley of salt ten thousand, and took Selah by war, and called the name of it Joktheel unto this day.

This war with Edom is described more fully in 2 Chr 25:5-16. This describes an unprovoked act of war on Edom, showing Amaziah's arrogance and cruelty. It was one more step down in Judah's progression to her final destruction. He also took its gods to Jerusalem and worshiped them (cf. 2 Chr 25:14ff.). Edom had revolted from Judean control during the reign of Jehoram. Amaziah wanted to regain control of this neighbor because Edom gave Judah access to southern trade routes. The battle took place in the Valley of Salt, a marshy plain at the south end of the Dead Sea (cf. 2 Sam 8:13). Sela, renamed Joktheel by Amaziah, was later named Petra, the stronghold city of Edom carved out of sheer mountain walls. [Prophetic destiny: Cf. *The Next Holocaust and the Refuge in Edom.*]

- 8] Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, Come, let us look one another in the face.
- 9] And Jehoash the king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, The thistle that *was* in Lebanon sent to the cedar that *was* in Lebanon, saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife: and there passed by a wild beast that *was* in Lebanon, and trode down the thistle.

The Israelite king responded to this challenge by sending a warning to Amaziah in the form of a parable. Thistles and cedars were common in

Lebanon. Amaziah was the thistle and Jehoash the cedar. As a wild beast could easily squash a thistle, so anyone could easily defeat Judah.

- 10] Thou hast indeed smitten Edom, and thine heart hath lifted thee up: glory *of this*, and tarry at home: for why shouldest thou meddle to *thy* hurt, that thou shouldest fall, *even* thou, and Judah with thee?

Jehoash's advice that Amaziah stay at home was good, but Amaziah's pride had been hurt by the story. So he committed himself even more strongly to war. His decision was of the Lord who intended that he should suffer defeat because after conquering the Edomites, Amaziah had brought Edomite idols into Judah and had worshiped them (cf. 2 Chr 25:14, 20).

- 11] But Amaziah would not hear. Therefore Jehoash king of Israel went up; and he and Amaziah king of Judah looked one another in the face at Bethshemesh, which *belongeth* to Judah.
- 12] And Judah was put to the worse before Israel; and they fled every man to their tents.
- 13] And Jehoash king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash the son of Ahaziah, at Bethshemesh, and came to Jerusalem, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim unto the corner gate, four hundred cubits.

Jehoash seized the initiative and attacked Judah. He faced Amaziah in battle at Beth Shemesh, about 15 miles west of Jerusalem. Judah was defeated, its troops retreated, and Amaziah was captured. Jehoash then proceeded to Jerusalem where he broke down 600 feet of the city wall.

- 14] And he took all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house, and hostages, and returned to Samaria.
- 15] Now the rest of the acts of Jehoash which he did, and his might, and how he fought with Amaziah king of Judah, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

This second mention of Jehoash's death (cf. 13:12-13) seems to be added here because of the unusual situation that existed with Amaziah being held prisoner in Israel. When Jehoash died (782 B.C.) Amaziah was released and returned to Judah. Jehoash's successor was his son Jeroboam II.

- 16] And Jehoash slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel; and Jeroboam his son reigned in his stead.
- 17] And Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah lived after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel fifteen years.

Amaziah (who died in 767) outlived Jehoash (who died in 782) by at least 15 years. After Amaziah returned to Judah he made his son Azariah his vice-regent. They shared the throne (790-767) until Amaziah's death.

- 18] And the rest of the acts of Amaziah, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?
- 19] Now they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem: and he fled to Lachish; but they sent after him to Lachish, and slew him there.

The people who conspired against Amaziah are not identified but may have been some of his own officials. The king fled to Lachish, a former royal city on the southern border of Judah, from which he could have fled the country if his enemies had not caught up with him first.

- 20] And they brought him on horses: and he was buried at Jerusalem with his fathers in the city of David.
- 21] And all the people of Judah took Azariah, which *was* sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah.

In 790 B.C. Azariah had begun to reign at the age of 16 when his father Amaziah was taken prisoner to Israel. Then when his father died in 767, Azariah began his sole reign.

- 22] He built Elath, and restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his fathers.

Jeroboam II's Evil Reign in Israel

Jeroboam II was fourth in Jehu's line. The Old Testament says very little about him, passing quickly over his time in 2 Kgs 14:23–29, and giving him brief mention in 1 Chr 5:17. Yet we know from archaeology that Jeroboam II was a vital, aggressive ruler. The later reign of Jeroboam II was a time of exploding prosperity for Israel. The earlier destruction of the military power of Syria had enabled Jeroboam to expand his kingdom, even taking over the old capital of Aram, Damascus. Now Israel controlled the important trade routes which crisscrossed Palestine, linking the ancient world. Their multiplied revenues made Israel rich.

The concentration of wealth stimulated economic corruption. Heavier and heavier taxes were laid on workers. The wealthy became land-hungry, forcing out the small farmers and building great estates. Many of the poor were forced to sell themselves and their families as bondservants, becoming no better than serfs on lands that had once been their own. Even the small merchants were corrupted, and it became common for them to use unjust weights to measure out purchases. The process of corruption was accelerated by the failure of the justice system. Rather than acting to protect the poor, judges took bribes from the rich and so joined the oppressors! The old middle class began to disappear, and the society was increasingly divided into the oppressed poor and the very rich.

In this situation the rich showed no sense of responsibility to the poor. Instead of showing compassion and concern, they seemed bent on depriving the poor of all rights and property. The heartlessness of the rich is well expressed in one angry charge hurled by Amos—these people are willing “to sell . . . the needy for a pair of sandals” (2:6). Luxury footwear meant more to the wealthy of Jeroboam II's day than did the suffering of fellow human beings.¹ Religiously, economically, and socially, Israel had become an unjust society. Again the summary in 2 Kings 17 written after Israel's deportation is succinct:

The Lord warned Israel and Judah through all His prophets and seers: 'Turn from your evil ways. Observe My commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your fathers to obey and that I delivered to you through My servants the prophets. But they would not listen.'
2 Kings 17:13–14

- 23] In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel began to reign in Samaria, *and reigned* forty and one years.

Jeroboam II had served as coregent with his father Jehoash from 793 to 782 B.C. The 15th year of Amaziah king of Judah marked the beginning of his sole reign (782 B.C.). In all, he reigned 41 years (793–753 B.C.), longer than any other king of Israel before him.

- 24] And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD: he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

Spiritually Jeroboam II followed in the footsteps of his predecessors in Israel. However, politically he was Israel's strongest king. Only a few of Jeroboam II's accomplishments are recorded; these were of lesser importance in view of the writer's emphasis on the spiritually significant aspects of Israel's history.

- 25] He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which *was* of Gathhepher.

Jeroboam II restored Israel's boundaries to approximately their extent in Solomon's time (excluding of course the Southern Kingdom's territory belonging to Judah and Benjamin). Lebo Hamath (cf. 1 Kgs 8:65) was over 150 miles northeast of the Sea of Kinnereth. The Sea of the Arabah was the Dead Sea. This territorial extension had been prophesied by Jonah, who ministered in Jeroboam II's reign. This prophecy of Jonah is not recorded elsewhere in Scripture but dating the prophet's time (780 B.C.). This is the same Jonah who traveled to Nineveh with God's message of repentance for the Assyrians (cf. Jonah 1:1).

- 26] For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, *that it was* very bitter: for *there was* not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel.
- 27] And the LORD said not that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven: but he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.

The suffering of the Israelites came as a result of the oppressive influence of Hazael of Damascus. Out of compassion for His people the LORD began to relieve their distress under Jehoash (cf. 2 Kgs 13:22-25) and continued to do so under Jeroboam II.

- 28] Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he warred, and how he recovered Damascus, and Hamath, *which belonged* to Judah, for Israel, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

Jeroboam II took Damascus, the Aramean capital, and Hamath. These cities (and their surrounding territory) had belonged to Yaudi (Judah) in the days of David and Solomon but not since that time. By controlling this area Jeroboam II undoubtedly also recovered all of Israel's Transjordanian territory which Hazael had seized (cf. 10:32-33), thus making Israel the largest country on the eastern Mediterranean coast. Jeroboam II's victories were accomplished because Damascus had been weakened by attacks from the Assyrians to their northeast under Adad-nirari III (cf. 13:5). Also Assyria herself was weak at this time, suffering from the threat of attack from the Urartu people on their northern frontier, internal dissension, and a series of weak rulers. Jehoash had been a successful military strategist (cf. 14:11-14), and his son Jeroboam II evidently inherited his father's abilities and even surpassed him.

- 29] And Jeroboam slept with his fathers, *even* with the kings of Israel; and Zachariah his son reigned in his stead.

During Jeroboam II's reign the Prophets Amos and Hosea ministered in Israel (Amos 1:1; Hosea 1:1). Their prophecies give additional insights into life in Israel during Jeroboam's reign. Jeroboam II died in 753 B.C. and his son Zechariah succeeded him (cf. 2 Kgs 15:8-12).

Three of the prophets spoke out during the time of Jeroboam II. Each of their messages constituted both a warning and a promise to the people of Israel. And each prophecy contains warnings and promises for *us*, who in many respects live in a time of prosperity much like that of Jeroboam's.

Jonah

Jonah is not only known from his book: He is also mentioned in the section of 2 Kings that traces the decline and fall of Israel in the North.

Jonah was somewhat unusual. He was a popular prophet. The reason was seen in this text (v.25). Jonah was popular because he foretold good things for Israel. And Jonah *was also a patriot*. This is why it was particularly difficult then when Jonah was sent to Nineveh to warn that city of coming judgment. Jonah was reluctant. Jonah 4:2 explains that Jonah was afraid that the people of Nineveh might heed him and repent, and that the Lord would withhold judgment. Jonah didn't want that!

Nineveh was capital of mighty Assyria, which had raided Israel before and which would later be the agent of Israel's destruction. So rather than going overland to Nineveh, Jonah found a ship going in the opposite direction! We all know the story of Jonah's repentance in the belly of the great fish. And we remember that he finally did go to Nineveh and deliver his message. We also remember the results: the people of Nineveh repented, and God withheld His judgment. The last we see of Jonah is the angry and discouraged prophet slumped on a hill overlooking the city, deaf to God's explanation of His concern for the children and even the dumb animals who would have perished with the responsible adults. But if we are to understand the impact of Jonah's ministry in Israel, we need to see his adventure as God's object lesson. Soon Amos and Hosea would appear. They would detail the sins of Israel, and call the people to return to the Lord. *The mission of Jonah to Nineveh provided proof that if only a people would repent, they could be saved.* But despite the example of Nineveh, the people of Israel simply would not respond to the prophets of the Lord. It was their failure to repent that made judgment inevitable!

Amos

Amos was one of the poor that the wealthy in Israel despised. He was a citizen of neighboring Judah, where he worked caring for sheep and a stand of sycamore trees. We know that Amos was poor, for sycamores were to the poor what figs were to the rich. Though neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, Amos responded to God's call and trudged in his rags across the border into Israel. There he must have visited the cities that had grown up around the worship centers at Bethel and Dan. He must have walked past the great houses, seen the luxury goods in stores outside of which the poor crouched. Walking through the market he must have noticed merchants mix chaff with the grain they sold, or slyly exchange honest weights for lighter ones when they measured out the purchases of the poor. Angered by the heartlessness and the materialism, Amos boldly identified the sins for which God was about to judge the Northern society. In his rebuke we can hear God's evaluation of man's greed, and a powerful expression of the divine values that had been expressed for centuries in the Law.

For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back My wrath. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane My holy name. They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines.

Amos 2:6–8

You hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth. You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. ... You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts. Therefore the prudent man keeps quiet in such times, for the times are evil.

Amos 5:11–13

Based on this indictment, Amos announced the sure approach of divine judgment. Yet, the example of God’s gracious dealing with Nineveh, not even His own people, should have offered hope! And Amos made this hope plain in a clear, well defined promise.

Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say He is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.

Amos 5:14–15

Hosea

We know little about the prophet. What we do know is heartrending. Hosea was called to suffer the pain of commitment to a faithless wife—a prostitute. His experience graphically reveals the meaning of Israel’s religious apostasy. Just as Hosea’s wife would not remain faithful to her marriage covenant, so God’s people had abandoned Him. The imagery of sexual unfaithfulness is appropriate in this case. The religions which the Israelites followed were nature faiths. They sought to influence fertility in lands and animals as well as humans by sexually stimulating the gods, whose passions were thought to overflow as fertility on earth. So the pagans of Palestine engaged in all sorts of sensual excess in an effort to arouse their gods. So idolatry and sexual promiscuity were closely linked in Hosea’s day. And God, through the anguished prophet, communicated something of His own anguish at His rejection by an Israel that ran after pagan, sensual faiths. Hosea announced proof upon proof of Israel’s abandonment of God and His Law.

There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying, and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

Hosea 4:1–2

Despite all this, God continued to pour out His love on Israel. In a beautiful passage Hosea describes God’s loving care.

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from Me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with the cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.

Hosea 11:1–4

Even so, God was anguished at the thought of giving Israel up and handing His people over to her enemies (11:8–11). Though Israel’s sin demanded punishment, ultimately this people would return to Him and beg forgiveness. Then, “I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for My anger has turned away from them” (14:4). But Israel was as unmoved by the pleas and the pain of Hosea as the nation had been by the angry denunciations of Amos. And Israel remained blind to the promise implicit in God’s gracious treatment of Nineveh. The prophets spoke. But Israel would not hear. [The apparent parallel with America should arrest our attention as well. Will we hear?]² Let’s return to a glimpse of the Southern Kingdom:

2 Kings 15

Azariah’s Good Reign in Judah

- 1] In the twenty and seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel began Azariah son of Amaziah king of Judah to reign.

Azariah (“Yahweh has helped”) is also called Uzziah (“Yahweh is my strength”) in the Old Testament (cf. vv. 13, 30, 32, 34; 2 Chr 26; Isa 1:1; Hos 1:1; Amos 1:1; Zech 14:5; etc.). The 27th year of Jeroboam II’s coregency with Jehoash was 767 B.C. In that year Azariah began to reign over Judah as sole ruler. He had previously served as king in his father’s place while Amaziah was imprisoned in Israel and as coregent with him after Amaziah returned to Judah.

- 2] Sixteen years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned two and fifty years in Jerusalem. And his mother’s name was Jecholiah of Jerusalem.

Azariah was 16 years old when he began his coregency (in 790 B.C.) and he reigned a total of 52 years (790-739 B.C.) in Jerusalem. Up to that time this was the longest reign of any king of Judah or Israel.

- 3] And he did *that which was right* in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done;

- 4] Save that the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burnt incense still on the high places.

Azariah was a good king like his father (cf. 2 Chr 26:4-5), but he too failed to remove the high places (cf. comments on 1 Kgs 22:43) where the people worshiped Yahweh in disobedience to the Law (cf. Deut 12:2-7, 13-14).

- 5] And the LORD smote the king, so that he was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house. And Jotham the king's son *was* over the house, judging the people of the land.

In many ways Azariah (Uzziah) was a good king. However, he did something that he should not have done: he intruded into the priest's office. For this he was smitten with leprosy (2 Chr 26:15–21). It broke Isaiah's heart when he died because Isaiah was afraid Azariah's successors would lead the nation back into idolatry. Isaiah's fears were well-grounded, for Azariah's grandson did just that. When Azariah became a leper (in 750 B.C.) he shared the throne with his son Jotham as coregent until he died in 739. Azariah lived a life of limited seclusion as required of lepers in Israel, but still played a part in leading the nation, with his son Jotham serving as executor of the palace.

- 6] And the rest of the acts of Azariah, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?
7] So Azariah slept with his fathers; and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David: and Jotham his son reigned in his stead.

When the king died he was buried in the City of David, undoubtedly in the royal tombs, and Jotham his son continued reigning in his place. Azariah was one of Judah's most effective and influential kings. He expanded Judah's territories southward to Elath (2 Kgs 14:22), eastward so that the Ammonites paid him tribute (2 Chr 26:8), and westward by defeating the Philistines (2 Chr 26:6-7). He fortified Jerusalem and other parts of Judah (2 Chr 26:9-10, 15), and reorganized the army (2 Chr 26:11-14). The combined territories of Azariah and Jeroboam II approximated those of David and Solomon. After Jeroboam II's death Azariah became even more powerful and was looked to for leadership by his neighbors who formed a coalition with him to resist the threat of Assyria. Unfortunately he became proud, intruded into the priest's office, and was tragically humbled by God (2 Chr 26:16-21).

Zechariah's Evil Reign in Israel

- 8] In the thirty and eighth year of Azariah king of Judah did Zachariah the son of Jeroboam reign over Israel in Samaria six months.

Zechariah succeeded Jeroboam II in Azariah's 38th year (753 B.C.), but he reigned only six months.

- 9] And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD, as his fathers had done: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.
10] And Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him, and smote him before the people, and slew him, and reigned in his stead.

He was assassinated publicly by Shallum. The fact that Shallum was allowed to assume the throne suggests that Zechariah did not enjoy strong public support.

- 11] And the rest of the acts of Zachariah, behold, they *are* written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.
12] This *was* the word of the LORD which he spake unto Jehu, saying, Thy sons shall sit on the throne of Israel unto the fourth *generation*. And so it came to pass.

Zechariah's death fulfilled God's word to Jehu that four generations would succeed him on Israel's throne (10:30). Thus Israel's fifth dynasty came to an end.

Shallum's Evil Reign in Israel

- 13] Shallum the son of Jabesh began to reign in the nine and thirtieth year of Uzziah king of Judah; and he reigned a full month in Samaria.

Shallum's one-month reign in 752 B.C. was the second shortest in Israel's history (after Zimri's seven-day reign, 1 Kgs 16:15-20).

- 14] For Menahem the son of Gadi went up from Tirzah, and came to Samaria, and smote Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria, and slew him, and reigned in his stead.
15] And the rest of the acts of Shallum, and his conspiracy which he made, behold, they *are* written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.
16] Then Menahem smote Tiphshah, and all that *were* therein, and the coasts thereof from Tirzah: because they opened not *to him*, therefore he smote *it*; and all the women therein that were with child he ripped up.

Menahem apparently attacked Tiphshah, perhaps near Tirzah and Samaria, because its inhabitants, who refused to acknowledge him as king, shut their gates against him. His violent destruction of the city, even down to murdering all the pregnant women, was probably intended to intimidate other Israelite towns into supporting him.

Menahem's Evil Reign in Israel

- 17] In the nine and thirtieth year of Azariah king of Judah began Menahem the son of Gadi to reign over Israel, and *reigned* ten years in Samaria.

Menahem began ruling in the 39th year of Azariah and reigned 10 years (752-742 B.C.). Menahem instituted Israel's seventh dynasty.

- 18] And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD: he departed not all his days from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.
19] *And* Pul the king of Assyria came against the land: and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to confirm the kingdom in his hand.

Pul has been identified from Assyrian inscriptions as Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.; cf. v. 29; 16:7, 10; 1 Chron. 5:26). This is the first mention of Assyria in 2 Kings. Pul was one of Assyria's strongest rulers. This invasion of Israel took place in 743 B.C. and resulted in Menahem's paying tribute to Pul. In return for the 1,000 talents (ca. 37 tons) of silver Menahem raised from the wealthy men of Israel, the Assyrian king gave Menahem his support and helped him retain his crown.

- 20] And Menahem exacted the money of Israel, *even* of all the mighty men of wealth, of each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and stayed not there in the land.
21] And the rest of the acts of Menahem, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?
22] And Menahem slept with his fathers; and Pekahiah his son reigned in his stead.

After Menahem died, he was succeeded by his son Pekahiah.

Pekahiah's Evil Reign in Israel

- 23] In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah Pekahiah the son of Menahem began to reign over Israel in Samaria, *and reigned* two years.

Pekahiah reigned two years in Samaria (742-740 B.C.). He too followed Jeroboam's apostate ways.

- 24] And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.
25] But Pekah the son of Remaliah, a captain of his, conspired against him, and smote him in Samaria, in the palace of the king's house, with Argob and Arieah, and with him fifty men of the Gileadites: and he killed him, and reigned in his room.

His reign ended when one of his military officers, Pekah, led 50 men, under his command from Gilead in Transjordan, to Samaria and there assassinated the king. Argob and Arieah, possibly princes, were also killed. This took place in the citadel, the most secure part of the palace, in Samaria. Pekah then assumed the throne of Israel. [His penchant for scheming shows up in an encryption in the text of Isaiah (discussed later).]

- 26] And the rest of the acts of Pekahiah, and all that he did, behold, they *are* written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

Pekah's Evil Reign in Israel

- 27] In the two and fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah Pekah the son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria, *and reigned* twenty years.

The 52nd year of Azariah was 740 B.C. (His 52nd year, his last, extended into part of 739.) At this time Pekah began to rule over Israel from Samaria. However, he had apparently never accepted Menahem's claim to the throne and had set up a rival government east of the Jordan River in Gilead. There Pekah lived as a military officer under the Samarian government, till the time was right for him to assert himself. His 20-year reign means that he began ruling in Gilead at the same time Menahem took the throne in Samaria (752 B.C.). His reign overlapped Menahem's and Pekahiah's (752-740 B.C.). In 740 B.C. he assassinated Pekahiah and started ruling in Samaria where he remained until he was overthrown in 732 B.C.

- 28] And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.
29] In the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abelbethmaachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria.

Part of Pekah's reason for opposing Menahem and his son Pekahiah seems to have been a different conviction regarding Israel's foreign policy toward Assyria. Menahem was conciliatory and willing to submit to Assyrian control (cf. vv. 19-20). Pekah apparently favored a harder line of resistance. Popular reaction against Menahem's taxing of the people may have encouraged Pekah to make his move. When Pekah had taken power in Samaria he made a treaty with Rezin, king of Damascus, against Assyria. This resulted in Tiglath-Pileser III (Pul) leading a campaign into Philistia, Israel, and later Aram in 734-732 B.C. In these battles he took Ijon, a town in Naphtali, Abel Beth Maacah, just south of Ijon, Janoah, another neighboring village, Kedesh, just west and north of Lake Huleh, and Hazor, south of Kedesh. He took all of Gilead east of the Jordan River and Galilee, the northern portion of Israel, including the territory of Naphtali, and he deported the people to Assyria. This first deportation of the Israelites probably took place in 733 B.C. A second deportation followed 11 years later in 722 B.C.

- 30] And Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and smote him, and slew him, and reigned in his stead, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah.

As a result of Israel's defeat Hoshea conspired against Pekah assassinated him, and succeeded him as king of Israel in 732 B.C. On one of the Assyrian inscriptions Tiglath-Pileser III claims to have had a hand in establishing Hoshea on the throne.⁴ Evidently Hoshea submitted to being a pawn of Assyria as Menahem and Pekahiah had done.

- 31] And the rest of the acts of Pekah, and all that he did, behold, they *are* written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

Jotham's Good Reign in Judah

- 32] In the second year of Pekah the son of Remaliah king of Israel began Jotham the son of Uzziah king of Judah to reign.
33] Five and twenty years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name *was* Jerusha, the daughter of Zadok.

Jotham's 16-year reign was from 750 to 735 B.C. Actually Jotham continued as coregent with his son Ahaz until 732 B.C., but during this time Ahaz was regarded as the official king.

- 34] And he did *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD: he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done.
35] Howbeit the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burned incense still in the high places. He built the higher gate of the house of the LORD.

Jotham was a good king, but he did not remove the high places (cf. comments on 1 Kgs 22:43). Only one of Jotham's accomplishments is recorded in 2 Kings. He rebuilt the Upper (north) Gate of the temple, perhaps to encourage the worship of Yahweh. Jotham's other building projects and his subjection of the Ammonites are recorded in 2 Chr 27:3-5. The reason he became a powerful king is that "he walked steadfastly before the LORD his God" (2 Chr 27:6).

- 36] Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?
37] In those days the LORD began to send against Judah Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah.
38] And Jotham slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father: and Ahaz his son reigned in his stead.

2 Kings 16 Ahaz's Evil Reign in Judah

- 1] In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah Ahaz the son of Jotham king of Judah began to reign.

- 2] Twenty years old *was* Ahaz when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem, and did not *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD his God, like David his father.

The 17th year of Pekah was 735 B.C. It was not until 732, however, that Ahaz began his 16-year reign, which continued to 715. The reign of Ahaz's father Jotham was 16 years (2 Chr 27:1), 750-735. But Jotham did not die until 732. Apparently, then, in the four years from 735 to 732 neither Jotham nor Ahaz was credited with independent rule; they were coregents. In another sense Ahaz's rule began in 744. Therefore he may have been a vice-regent under his father Jotham from 744 to 735.

- 3] But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel.

Unlike his ancestor David, with whom many of the Judean kings were compared, Ahaz did not do the will of God. Instead he followed the examples of the wicked kings of the Northern Kingdom. He went so far as to sacrifice his son (obviously not Hezekiah, who succeeded him as king) as a burnt offering to an idol. This heinous sin (cf. 17:17) was a common practice of the Ammonites and the other native pagan Canaanite nations that Israel under Joshua had partially driven out of the land.

- 4] And he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.

Ahaz also promoted worship at the high places (cf. comments on 1 Kgs 22:43), on hilltops and under large trees. These places of worship were so numerous that the writer said hyperbolically that they could be found under every spreading tree (cf. 2 Kgs 17:10).

- 5] Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to war: and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome *him*.

Rezin and Pekah had formed an alliance to resist Assyrian aggression and they wanted Ahaz to join them. Ahaz, however, did not feel Assyria's threat as keenly as did his neighbors who were situated between Judah and Assyria. Ahaz preferred a conciliatory policy with Assyria. Consequently Rezin and Pekah attacked Ahaz hoping to force him to join them. But they were unsuccessful in this attempt for reasons stated in verses 7-9. In the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 7, there is an extended section on this. It is a very important section, because in it is the prophecy of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Isaiah is prophesying to this man Ahaz who will not listen to God. So Isaiah challenges him to trust God. Then Ahaz appeals to Assyria for

help. This opens the door for Assyria to come down and ultimately take the northern kingdom into captivity.

- 6] At that time Rezin king of Syria recovered Elath to Syria, and drove the Jews from Elath: and the Syrians came to Elath, and dwelt there unto this day.

The writer inserted parenthetically here that Rezin was successful in taking Elath at the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba which Azariah had recently made a Judean city (14:22). This important port town thus passed into Aramean control. Judah never was able to recapture it. It later fell to the Edomites.

- 7] So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, saying, I am thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me.
8] And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent it for a present to the king of Assyria.

Rather than joining Rezin and Pekah Ahaz appealed for help to Tiglath-Pileser III. Ahaz voluntarily submitted as a vassal to Assyrian control and sent a gift of silver and gold from the temple and palace in Jerusalem to encourage Tiglath-Pileser to get his harassing neighbors away from his walls. Tiglath-Pileser obliged by attacking and capturing Rezin's capital Damascus.

- 9] And the king of Assyria hearkened unto him: for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin.

This diverted the Arameans from besieging Jerusalem; they had to return home to defend their own territory. Damascus fell to Assyria, Rezin was executed, and many of the Arameans were deported to Kir, an area of Assyria, in keeping with the Assyrians' policy of relocating conquered peoples (cf. 15:29; 17:23). Ahaz's decision to appeal to Assyria for help was a foolish one (cf. Isa. 7). Besides losing many of his people to Pekah in the siege (2 Chr 28:5-8), Ahaz encouraged further Assyrian advancement into Palestine. The chronicler also recorded successful invasions of Judah by the Edomites and the Philistines at that time (2 Chr 28:17-19). All these losses resulted ultimately from Ahaz's apostasy (2 Chr 28:19).

An Encryption

This conspiracy between Rezin and Pekah is the subject of an encryption in the text of Isaiah 7. It comes as a surprise to many Bible scholars that there are a number of classic encryptions within the Biblical text. Hebrew tradition lists three different transformations in the Old Testament.⁵

(These are not to be confused with the controversial "equidistant letter sequence" form of coding which has been the subject of popular conjectures, etc.) One of these, known as *albam*, employs a substitution system in which the Hebrew alphabet is split into two halves and equates the two halves. (The term "alphabet" itself is derived from the first two letters in Hebrew: "aleph-beth.") Thus, the first letter of the first half, *aleph*, substitutes for the first letter of the second half, *lamed*, and vice versa. The second letter of the first half, *beth*, substitutes for the second letter of the second half, *mem*, and vice versa, and so on. The term *albam* derives from the first four letters of this arrangement.

כ י ט ח ז ו ה ד ג ב א
ת ש ר ק צ פ ע ס נ מ ל

In Isaiah Chapter 7, we encounter the scheming of Rezin, the king of Syria, and Pekah, the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, who were confederating against King Ahaz of Judah. Regarding Isaiah 7:6, the *Midrash* notes that *Tabeal*, טבאל, is encrypted using the method of *albam*, resulting in the name, רמלי, *Remala* (for *Remaliah*).⁶ (Remember, Hebrew reads from right to left. All languages seem to flow toward Jerusalem: Languages of the nations west of Jerusalem—English, French, German, Italian, etc.—read from left to right. Languages of the nations east of Jerusalem—Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, Sanskrit, Chinese, etc.—read from right to left.) The plan of the conspirators in Isaiah 7 was apparently to establish Pekah, the son of "Tabeal," as the king should their plot have succeeded.⁷ [This is also the occasion in which Isaiah gives us the fabulous prophecy of the virgin birth in 7:14!]

- 10] And king Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar that was at Damascus: and king Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the fashion of the altar, and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof.

Ahaz traveled to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser III. There he saw an altar (a large one; cf. v. 15) which was Aramean or, more likely, Assyrian. Ahaz sent Uriah the high priest in Jerusalem a sketch of this altar with instructions to have one built just like it. The apostasy of the priesthood at that time can be seen in Uriah's speedy acquiescence.

- 11] And Urijah the priest built an altar according to all that king Ahaz had sent from Damascus: so Urijah the priest made it against king Ahaz came from Damascus.
12] And when the king was come from Damascus, the king saw the altar: and the king approached to the altar, and offered thereon.
13] And he burnt his burnt offering and his meat offering, and poured his drink offering, and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings, upon the altar.

- 14] And he brought also the brasen altar, which *was* before the LORD, from the forefront of the house, from between the altar and the house of the LORD, and put it on the north side of the altar.

When Ahaz returned home he had the Lord's bronze altar of burnt offering moved aside to give a prominent place to the new altar. On it he offered the traditional offerings of Judah.

- 15] And king Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying, Upon the great altar burn the morning burnt offering, and the evening meat offering, and the king's burnt sacrifice, and his meat offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, and their meat offering, and their drink offerings; and sprinkle upon it all the blood of the burnt offering, and all the blood of the sacrifice: and the brasen altar shall be for me to enquire *by*.
- 16] Thus did Urijah the priest, according to all that king Ahaz commanded.
- 17] And king Ahaz cut off the borders of the bases, and removed the laver from off them; and took down the sea from off the brasen oxen that *were* under it, and put it upon a pavement of stones.
- 18] And the covert for the sabbath that they had built in the house, and the king's entry without, turned he from the house of the LORD for the king of Assyria.
- 19] Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz which he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?
- 20] And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David: and Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead.

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) What was the *context* of Isaiah 7 which gives us the prophecy of the virgin birth (Isa 7:14).
- 2) Highlight the major impacts of the reigns of Jehu and Jeroboam II.
- 3) Characterize the conditions in Israel socially and religiously.
- 4) Why was Jonah reluctant to follow the Lord's call?
- 5) Summarize the ministries of Jonah, Amos, and Hosea, and their impact on the Northern Kingdom.
- 6) Pick three of the major kings in both the Northern Kingdom and Southern Kingdom that had the most impact and explain why.

Discussion Questions

("Where two people agree, one is redundant.")

- 1) What would it have been like to have lived in Israel during this period?

- 2) Should Christians be involved in social justice issues? Which ones? Compile a list.
- 3) Is there an parallel between the Northern Kingdom and America? What are the implications?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Review the various forms of encryption in the Biblical text (exclusive of "Equidistant Letter Sequences" (ELSS)).

Preparation for Next Session:

Reads 2 Kings 17 – 20. Also 2 Chronicles 29-32; Isaiah 36 - 39.

Notes:

1. Larry Richards, *Word Bible Handbook*, Word Publishing, Waco TX.
2. See our briefing, *Hosea Can You Hear?* or review our *Expositional Commentary on Hosea*.
3. Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 9. 11. 1.
4. James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969, p. 284.
5. See *Cosmic Codes – Hidden Messages From the Edge of Eternity*, pp.48ff, for a fuller discussion.
6. *Midrash Rabbah*, Numbers 18:21.
7. Some authorities regard Tabeal as a corruption or some form of contemptuous epithet and dispute this as albam. (Albam works for the first two letters; the third, lamed, retains its identity because it would otherwise be transformed into a silent aleph.)

Session 6 2 Kings 17 - 20

Captivity of Israel by Assyria (2 Kings 17); Hoshea's evil reign in Israel (17:1-6); Israel's Captivity (17:7-41); Captivity of Judah by Babylon (2 Kings 18-25); Hezekiah's good reign (chaps. 18-20).

2 Kings 17 The End of the Northern Kingdom

Hoshea's Evil Reign in Israel

- 1] In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah began Hoshea the son of Elah to reign in Samaria over Israel nine years.

Hoshea became king in 732 B.C., the 12th year of Ahaz. Ahaz's reign, which began in 744, included 9 years as vice-regent (744-735), 4 years as coregent with his father Jotham (735-732), and 16 years as principal king (732-715). Hoshea began his reign of 9 years in the 20th year of Jotham (15:30), which was 732 B.C. Jotham's 20 years (750-732) included his 16-year reign (750-735) and 4 years as coregent with Ahaz (735-732). Jotham's reign from 750 to 732 appears to be 18 or 19 years, but it was considered 20 years because he reigned 18 full years and parts of two other years.

- 2] And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him.
- 3] Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant, and gave him presents.

Shalmaneser V (727-722 B.C.) had succeeded his father Tiglath-Pileser III on the throne of Assyria.

- 4] And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea: for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and brought no present to the king of Assyria, as *he had done* year by year: therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison.

He attacked Samaria because Hoshea had failed to pay the yearly tribute he owed as a vassal. Instead of paying his taxes Hoshea tried to make a treaty with So (Osorkon IV, ca. 727-716 B.C.) king of Egypt. This was a foolish mistake because Egypt did not and apparently could not help Hoshea. Shalmaneser discovered Hoshea's plan to revolt, marched on Israel, and took Hoshea prisoner. Shalmaneser then subdued the remaining territory of the Northern Kingdom:

- 5] Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years.
- 6] In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor *by* the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

It took Shalmaneser 3 years to capture Samaria. He took it in Hoshea's ninth year (722 B.C.) and deported many of the people to Assyria (cf. 18:9-11). The Israelites were sent to various parts of the Assyrian Empire.

Israel's Termination as a Nation

After just over two centuries the Northern Kingdom of Israel ceased to exist as a nation (931-722 B.C.). Seven of her 20 kings were assassinated. All were judged to be evil by God.

- 7] For *so* it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods,
- 8] And walked in the statutes of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made.

The defeat and deportation of Israel took place because the Israelites sinned against God. In view of His miraculous liberating redemption of the nation from Egyptian bondage, their sin was even more serious. How ironic that the last king Hoshea had sought help from Egypt (v. 4) when 724 years earlier (1446 B.C.) Israel had finally escaped from Egypt.

- 9] And the children of Israel did secretly *those* things that *were* not right against the LORD their God, and they built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city.

Israel did not forsake the LORD completely but worshiped other gods (idols; cf. v. 12) also (cf. Ex 20:3). They compromised with their pagan neighbors and followed the practices of the very nations God dispossessed because of their wickedness.

- 10] And they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree:
- 11] And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as *did* the heathen whom the LORD carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger:
- 12] For they served idols, whereof the LORD had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing.
- 13] Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, *and by* all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments *and* my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets.

Their worship involved wicked behavior that angered the LORD (cf. 13:3; 17:17). Their idolatry involved disobeying a plainly revealed prohibition by God. God had sent the prophets **Ahijah, Elijah, Micaiah, Elisha, Jonah, Amos, and Hosea** to the northern kingdom of Israel; and **Shemaiah, Joel, Isaiah and Micah** to the southern kingdom of Judah. Later on He will be sending **Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah**. Every prophet warned the people of both kingdoms what would take place if they did not return to God and forsake their evil ways. The Israelites deliberately rejected the covenant God had made with their ancestors as well as His decrees.

- 14] Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God.
- 15] And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and

his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that *were* round about them, *concerning* whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them.

They took on the characteristics of the idols, which they put first in their lives (Cf. Ps 135:15-18). They imitated the godless nations around them in spite of God's order not to follow their example. They practiced the things God had told them not to do.

- 16] And they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made them molten images, *even* two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal.

Forsaking all God's commands, they fashioned two calves out of metal and worshiped them at Dan and Bethel (cf. 1 Kgs 12:28-29; Deut 4:14-19). In Samaria, their capital city, Israel set up a pole that symbolized the Canaanite fertility goddess Asherah (2 Kgs 13:6). They worshiped the planets and stellar constellations (cf. 21:5; 23:4-5) with their neighbors and practiced astrology (cf. Deut 4:19). They also worshiped Baal, the male fertility god of the Near East.

- 17] And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.

They even followed the brutal practice of offering their children as human sacrifices to placate the gods (cf. 2 Kgs 16:3; Deut 18:10). They practiced divination (witchcraft) and sorcery (consulted evil spirits; cf. Deut 18:10-11). In doing all these things the Israelites sold themselves to sin, thereby provoking the LORD to anger (cf. 2 Kgs 13:3; 17:11).

- 18] Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only.

Because they were so rebellious, God in anger at their attitude disciplined His people by deporting them from His presence (i.e., out of the land; cf. v. 23, where He had promised to dwell with them). Exile was one of the curses (judgments) God said He would bring on the nation if the people disobeyed Him (Deut 28:45-48).

- 19] Also Judah kept not the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made.

Even the Southern Kingdom disobeyed the LORD. Many Judahites imitated the Israelites and adopted the practices their brethren had introduced. Because of this God punished the Southern Kingdom too. He sent Judah

affliction and let the people suffer at the hands of other nations that plundered them till they too were led captive out of their land.

- 20] And the LORD rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until he had cast them out of his sight.

(These statements in vv. 18b-20 are editorial comments inserted by the writer of 2 Kings after Judah had been taken into captivity.)

- 21] For he rent Israel from the house of David; and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king: and Jeroboam drave Israel from following the LORD, and made them sin a great sin.

God tore Israel away from Judah (the house or dynasty of David) in Rehoboam's day because of the sins of Solomon (1 Kgs 11:9-13). The Israelites then made Jeroboam their king. He enticed the nation away from God and caused them to worship two golden calves (cf. 2 Kgs 17:16).

- 22] For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them;
23] Until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day.

For these reasons—flagrant idolatry, obstinate disobedience, star-worship, child sacrifices, and occult practices—the Israelites were removed from the land God had given them as their home into exile in Assyria. They were still there when the writer penned these words.

- 24] And the king of Assyria brought *men* from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed *them* in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof.

The king of Assyria was probably Sargon II (722-705 B.C.). Shalmaneser V died either during or shortly after the siege of Samaria. The policy of Assyria toward conquered lands was to deport many of the most influential inhabitants and then import many leading Assyrians to take their places. Sargon brought people from Babylon, Cuthah (a city northeast of Babylon), Avva (between Anah and the Habor River; cf. v. 6, on the Euphrates River), Hamath (a city in Aram on the Orontes River), and Sepharvaim (people from Sippar on the Euphrates above Babylon) and settled them in the towns of Israel, now called the Assyrian province of Samaria. They took leadership in the province and settled down in various towns. This planted the roots of what later became known as Samaritans (sometimes called "half-Jews.")

25] And *so* it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, *that* they feared not the LORD: therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which slew *some* of them.

Because the people did not worship the LORD He sent lions among them. The lions already in Israel may have multiplied more quickly because of the reduced human population. God sometimes used these wild animals as His agents of judgment (cf. 1 Kgs 13:23-26; 20:36); they killed some of the people.

26] Wherefore they spake to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land.

The Assyrians interpreted this as a punishment from the God of Israel whom they viewed as a deity who needed to be placated. Since they did not know how to appease Him they reported the situation to Sargon.

27] Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, Carry thither one of the priests whom ye brought from thence; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the manner of the God of the land.

28] Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD.

The priest moved to Bethel. If this had been his former dwelling place he was probably one of the priests involved in worshipping the golden calf there.

29] Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put *them* in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt.

Each national group of Assyrian immigrants set up shrines for the worship of their own pagan gods wherever they settled, using the high places the Israelites had frequented. The national groups (cf. v. 24) and their idols are listed (vv. 30-31) along with some of their pagan practices.

30] And the men of Babylon made Succothbenoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima,

31] And the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burnt their children in fire to Adramelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim.

32] So they feared the LORD, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places.

33] They feared the LORD, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence.

The writer wrote that these people worshiped the LORD and also their gods. This syncretism was forbidden by the Lord (Ex 20:3). 2 Kings 17:24-33 shows how the Samaritan people came into being. The Samaritans, racially a mixture

of Israelites and various other ancient Near Eastern peoples, were despised by full-blooded Jews (cf. Jn 4:9). Possibly, however, the Samaritans were the pure descendants of the Israelites who remained in the land.

34] Unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the LORD, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the law and commandment which the LORD commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel;

35] With whom the LORD had made a covenant, and charged them, saying, Ye shall not fear other gods, nor bow yourselves to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them:

36] But the LORD, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a stretched out arm, him shall ye fear, and him shall ye worship, and to him shall ye do sacrifice.

37] And the statutes, and the ordinances, and the law, and the commandment, which he wrote for you, ye shall observe to do for evermore; and ye shall not fear other gods.

38] And the covenant that I have made with you ye shall not forget; neither shall ye fear other gods.

39] But the LORD your God ye shall fear; and he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies.

God had changed Jacob's name to Israel to show that he and his descendants were to become a distinct people in the world. This distinctiveness was being broken down by the Samaritans. This distinctiveness is further highlighted by a loose quotation in verses 35-39 of several commands from the Mosaic Law (Ex 6:6; 20:4-5, 23; Deut 4:23, 34; 5:6, 15, 32; 6:12; 7:11, 25; etc.).

40] Howbeit they did not hearken, but they did after their former manner.

41] So these nations feared the LORD, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day.

2 Kings 18 Hezekiah's Good Reign

The writer of 1 and 2 Kings devoted more space and gave more commendation to Hezekiah for his accomplishments than to any king except Solomon. It is not only recorded here in 2 Kings, but also in 2 Chronicles, and in the historical section of the prophecy of Isaiah.

1] Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, *that* Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign.

2] Twenty and five years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also *was* Abi, the daughter of Zachariah.

Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah, was a very wicked king; yet he had this wonderful son. This leads us to believe that Abi, the mother of Hezekiah, was a very fine mother and a godly woman. Evidently Hezekiah reigned as coregent with his father Ahaz for 14 years (729-715 B.C.). The third year of Hoshea was the year in which Hezekiah is said to have begun reigning (as coregent with Ahaz), namely, 729 B.C. He reigned alone for 18 years (715-697) and then as coregent with his son Manasseh for 11 years (697-686). Together these two reigns were 29 years (715-686 B.C.).

- 3] And he did *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did.

The commendation that Hezekiah did right as David had done is made of only three other kings of Judah: Asa (1 Kgs 15:11), Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 17:3), and Josiah (2 Kgs 22:2).

- 4] He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan.

Like Jehoshaphat before him Hezekiah removed the high places (2 Chr 17:6) where the Lord was worshiped contrary to the Mosaic Law (cf. Deut 12:2-7, 13-14). (Later, however, Jehoshaphat did not remove the high places, 1 Kgs 22:43; 2 Chr 20:33. Apparently the people rebuilt them and Jehoshaphat did not remove them again.) Josiah also destroyed the idols used to aid in the worship of Baal and Asherah (2 Chr 31:1).

The Brazen Serpent

The bronze snake that Moses made in the wilderness (Num 21:1-9) had been preserved and had become a religious fetish. The brazen serpent was a symbol that was fulfilled by Christ:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

John 3:14-15

These people had turned the thing all around and had begun to worship the serpent instead of God. Hezekiah broke it up since it was a spiritually unclean thing; it had become a stumbling block to the Israelites. (נְהוּשְׁטָן *Nehushtan* was the name of the snake, a word that sounded like the Heb. for “bronze,” “snake,” and “unclean thing”).

- 5] He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor *any* that were before him.

- 6] For he clave to the LORD, *and* departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses.
7] And the LORD was with him; *and* he prospered whithersoever he went forth: and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not.

Hezekiah’s best quality was that he trusted in the LORD. He was the greatest of all the kings of the Southern Kingdom in this respect. Unlike some of the other kings he did not apostasize later in life but kept the Mosaic Covenant faithfully. As a result the LORD was with him and blessed him with success in all he undertook. The writer of 2 Kings gave only a brief record of Hezekiah’s spiritual reforms and activities; the chronicler recorded many more. His rebellion against Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.), king of Assyria, precipitated the Assyrian invasion recorded later (18:13-19:36). Hezekiah was anti-Assyrian in contrast with his father Ahaz. But so long as Sargon II remained on the throne Hezekiah wisely did not antagonize the Assyrians. With the accession of Sennacherib, Sargon’s son, Hezekiah judged that Assyria was not so strong. He decided to join an alliance with neighboring nations to oppose the northern foe and began making preparations for Assyria’s anticipated retaliation.

- 8] He smote the Philistines, *even* unto Gaza, and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city.

Hezekiah was successful in defeating the Philistines who had taken several cities from Judah during Ahaz’s reign (2 Chr 28:18). Gaza was the southernmost city in Philistia. “From tower of the watchmen to the fenced city” means wherever he turned.

- 9] And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Hezekiah, which *was* the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, *that* Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria, and besieged it.
10] And at the end of three years they took it: *even* in the sixth year of Hezekiah, that *is* the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken.

At the end of three years (in 722) Shalmaneser V captured Israel’s capital. The places to which the Israelites were deported for resettlement are the same as those mentioned in 17:6.

- 11] And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel unto Assyria, and put them in Halah and in Habor *by* the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes:
12] Because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed his covenant, *and* all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and would not hear *them*, nor do *them*.

This summary statement states why Israel fell: she was disobedient to the Mosaic Law (cf. 17:7-23).

Jerusalem's Siege by Assyria

The following section is recorded also in the Book of Isaiah (chaps. 36-37) with only a few changes.

- 13] Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah did Sennacherib king of Assyria come up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them.

Sennacherib's predecessor Sargon II had continued to expand Assyrian territory and to strengthen her hold on conquered peoples. He put down a revolt headed by Hamath (a city north of Damascus; cf. 14:28), fought successfully in Asia Minor, squelched a revolution at Carchemish north of Hamath and deported its population, broke the power of Assyria's hated northern neighboring kingdom Urartu, and moved down into Philistia where he crushed a rebellion led by the city of Ashdod, then the leading city in Philistia. Hezekiah prepared for an Assyrian invasion by fortifying Jerusalem (cf. 2 Chr 32:1-8). Sennacherib led his armies into Judah as expected. This was in 701 B.C., the 14th year of Hezekiah's sole reign which began in 715 B.C.

On their way to Judah the Assyrians defeated the rebels in Phoenicia. Then Sennacherib marched his armies down the coast into Philistia where he brought the Philistine cities into line. Next he attacked all the fortified cities of Judah except Jerusalem and captured the people. Sennacherib's inscriptions refer to his conquest of 46 strong cities of Hezekiah plus many villages.

- 14] And Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended; return from me: that which thou puttest on me will I bear. And the king of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.

The Assyrian king then set up his headquarters at Lachish, a well-fortified city near the Philistine border in central Judah, in preparation for his siege of Jerusalem. Understandably Hezekiah did not want to fight Sennacherib, whose armies had been consistently successful against other members of the now severely weakened alliance. So Hezekiah sent a message to Sennacherib at Lachish. He offered to pay whatever the Assyrian king demanded if he would withdraw and not attack Jerusalem. Sennacherib asked for 300 talents (ca. 11 tons) of silver and 30 talents (ca. 1 ton) of gold.

- 15] And Hezekiah gave *him* all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house.
16] At that time did Hezekiah cut off *the gold from* the doors of the temple of the LORD, and *from* the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

Hezekiah paid him all the silver in the treasuries of the temple and palace. To gather all the gold the king had to strip off all the gold plating on the temple doors and door frames.

- 17] And the king of Assyria sent Tartan and Rabsaris and Rabshakeh from Lachish to king Hezekiah with a great host against Jerusalem. And they went up and came to Jerusalem. And when they were come up, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which *is* in the highway of the fuller's field.

The ransom did not satisfy Sennacherib, however, so he sent messengers to demand a complete surrender. At first they presented their claims only to Hezekiah's representatives (vv. 17-27) but then to all the people of Jerusalem (vv. 28-37). The three officers sent by Sennacherib were his top men. They went with a large army to intimidate Hezekiah so he would capitulate without resistance. They advanced by way of the road to the Washerman's Field to the aqueduct of the Upper Pool that extended from the spring of Gihon to the field where the people washed their clothes. This was within earshot of the wall of Jerusalem (cf. v. 26) and was a busy location.

- 18] And when they had called to the king, there came out to them Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, which *was* over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder.
19] And Rabshakeh said unto them, Speak ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence *is* this wherein thou trustest?

Sennacherib's field commander spoke for his side and repeated his king's message to Hezekiah. What he said was designed to impress Hezekiah with Sennacherib's power and glory, and to intimidate him into surrendering. He asked the basis of Hezekiah's confidence that he could possibly withstand the great king of Assyria.

- 20] Thou sayest, (but *they are but* vain words,) *I have* counsel and strength for the war. Now on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me?
21] Now, behold, thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, *even* upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so *is* Pharaoh king of Egypt unto all that trust on him.

Assuming Judah was depending on strategy and force, the commander pointed out the weakness of both these resources. Egypt was the only member of the alliance yet remaining, and she would splinter like a weak reed if any weight of confidence were placed on her. Rather than helping Judah, Egypt would hurt her by both failing and frustrating Hezekiah. The commander was correct; Egypt was not strong at that time and could not be counted on for help. [There is a counter-view: Henry T. Aubin, *The Rescue of Jerusalem*, Soho Press, New York 2002, dealing with the alliance between the Hebrews and the Kushites in 701 B.C.]

- 22] But if ye say unto me, We trust in the LORD our God: *is* not that he, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and hath said to Judah and Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?

If the Judahites' strategy was to rely on the LORD, the commander said they should remember that Hezekiah had incurred His wrath (he supposed) by removing the high places and altars (cf. v. 4) where the Lord had been worshiped throughout the land. The Assyrians obviously had information about what had been going on in Judah, but they did not understand that Hezekiah's actions had been carried out in obedience to God's commands, not out of disrespect for Him.

- 23] Now therefore, I pray thee, give pledges to my lord the king of Assyria, and I will deliver thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them.

The commander called on Hezekiah to strike a bargain and surrender. This, the commander reasoned, would be wise. The Judahites had few horses; this was part of the help Hezekiah had hoped to get from Egypt. Even if Sennacherib were to give Judah 2,000 horses Hezekiah could not put trained cavalymen on them.

- 24] How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen?
25] Am I now come up without the LORD against this place to destroy it? The LORD said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it.

The commander's final appeal was a strong one. He claimed that the LORD had commanded his master to attack and destroy Jerusalem. Though this is improbable it is not impossible (cf. Isa 45:1-6). The people of Judah had seen Israel fall to Assyria. Might not God's plan be the same for Judah?

- 26] Then said Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and Shebna, and Joah, unto Rabshakeh, Speak, I pray thee, to thy servants in the Syrian language; for we understand *it*: and talk not with us in the Jews' language in the ears of the people that *are* on the wall.

Hezekiah's three representatives realized that these arguments could make the people lose heart, so they asked the Assyrians to speak only in the Aramaic language which only the educated leaders of Israel understood.

- 27] But Rabshakeh said unto them, Hath my master sent me to thy master, and to thee, to speak these words? *hath he* not *sent me* to the men which sit on the wall, that they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss with you?

The commander refused; he realized the importance of destroying the people's confidence in their ability to succeed in any military encounter against the Assyrian army. The commander replied that he had been sent

with this message to all the people, not just the leaders of Judah. After all, it was the common people who would suffer most from a long siege and the resulting famine. They would be reduced to eating their own excrement and drinking their own urine. Nothing could be more repulsive to the residents of Jerusalem than this possibility. The commander wanted the people to conclude that surrender would be better than resistance.

- 28] Then Rabshakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and spake, saying, Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria:
29] Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you out of his hand:
30] Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, The LORD will surely deliver us, and this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria.
31] Harken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make *an agreement* with me by a present, and come out to me, and *then* eat ye every man of his own vine, and every one of his fig tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his cistern:

It would be better for the people, the commander promised, if they surrendered. Rather than siege and starvation there would be peace and plenty to eat and drink. Each person having his own vine and fig tree is a figure of speech for enjoying peace and prosperity (cf. 1 Kgs 4:25; Micah 4:4; Zech 3:10). When under a siege one of the first needs people faced was water. Hezekiah had provided for this need by cutting a tunnel from the spring of Gihon under the wall of the city to the Pool of Siloam (cf. 2 Kgs 20:20) but the Assyrians did not know about this or chose to ignore it. [You can crawl through this tunnel when you visit Jerusalem.]

- 32] Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil olive and of honey, that ye may live, and not die: and hearken not unto Hezekiah, when he persuadeth you, saying, The LORD will deliver us.

In time, the commander said, the Assyrians would transport them to other cities. The people had heard that this was Assyrian policy. But he assured them that they would be sent to a land like their own where they would have plenty of their favorite foods and drink. The commander punctuated his eloquent and attractive appeal with a call to choose surrender and life rather than resistance and certain death.

- 33] Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?
34] Where *are* the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? where *are* the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? have they delivered Samaria out of mine hand?

He next focused on Hezekiah's promise to the people that the LORD would deliver them if they trusted in Him. His ideas reflect a polytheistic and

pagan concept of God but his words could not help but raise questions in his hearers' minds. No other gods had been able to deliver their worshipers from the might of Assyria. The places mentioned were probably known to the Judahites. Arpad was 13 miles north of Aleppo in Aram. Hena and Ivvah were north of the Euphrates River east of Hamath. (On Hamath and Sepharvaim see 17:24.)

- 35] Who *are* they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand?
36] But the people held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not.

The Assyrian commander's rhetorical questions (vv. 33-35) needed no answer and the people gave him none. Hezekiah had previously instructed the people not to reply to the cunning general's statements. Undoubtedly those forceful arguments aroused much heated discussion among the common people after the Assyrian messengers departed.

- 37] Then came Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, which *was* over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder, to Hezekiah with *their* clothes rent, and told him the words of Rabshakeh.

The summit conference broke up and Hezekiah's three representatives (cf. v. 18) returned to the king. He could see that they had torn their clothes out of great distress (cf. Gen 37:29, 34; Josh 7:6; 2 Kgs 5:7; 6:30; 11:14; 22:11; Est 4:1; Job 1:20; 2:12); they faced a most serious situation. Then they told him what the Assyrians had said.

2 Kings 19

- 1] And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard *it*, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD.

He put on sackcloth, coarse goats'-hair clothing that symbolized self-affliction and despair (cf. Gen 37:34; 1 Kgs 21:27; Neh 9:1; Est 4:1-4; Dan 9:3). He then went into the temple to seek God's face in prayer.

- 2] And he sent Eliakim, which *was* over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz.
3] And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day *is* a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and *there* is not strength to bring forth.

The king's representatives conveyed Hezekiah's message that this was indeed a black day in Judah's history. They were distressed, rebuked by God for their sins, and disgraced before their enemies. A crisis had come to a head

but now there was not adequate strength to resist the Assyrian invasion. It was like a pregnant woman who finally goes into labor but cannot deliver her child for lack of strength. It seemed as if the whole nation would die.

- 4] It may be the LORD thy God will hear all the words of Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God; and will reprove the words which the LORD thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up *thy* prayer for the remnant that are left.

Hezekiah's hope was that God would act on behalf of His people and prove that He was the true and living God by granting a miraculous deliverance to His people. The king called on the prophet Isaiah to pray for the small remnant of people left in Jerusalem and Judah.

- 5] So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah.
6] And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say to your master, Thus saith the LORD, Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me.

Isaiah responded to the king's request with a message of hope from the LORD. The Lord encouraged the king not to fear the blasphemous words of Sennacherib's underlings.

- 7] Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.
8] So Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah: for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish.

Sennacherib's field commander pitched his tents near Jerusalem and waited for Hezekiah to send him a message of surrender. While the commander was there, word reached him that Sennacherib had left Lachish (cf. 18:14). He withdrew from Jerusalem and located his master near Libnah where he was engaged in battle. Libnah was just a few miles north of Lachish. This is why he removed his large army (18:17) from the walls of Jerusalem.

- 9] And when he heard say of Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, Behold, he is come out to fight against thee: he sent messengers again unto Hezekiah, saying,

While Sennacherib was at Libnah (or perhaps Lachish) he received a report (cf. v. 7) that Tirhakah, the king of Egypt, who was from Cush (modern-day southern Egypt, Sudan, and northern Ethiopia), and an ally of Hezekiah, was marching up to fight Sennacherib. (There is insufficient evidence to support the contention by some scholars that Tirhakah was only a boy at this time, incapable of leading such an attack and that this whole campaign of Sennacherib's (18:17-19:36) therefore must have taken place in 686 B.C. rather than in 701 B.C.)

10] Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria.

Somehow Sennacherib knew that the king of Judah had been told (by Isaiah) that Yahweh would deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrians. He sent a message to Hezekiah not to believe this prophecy even though it looked as if the Assyrians were withdrawing.

11] Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered?

He boasted of previous victories in all the surrounding countries. His armies had destroyed many of them completely. Surely Jerusalem would not be spared, he claimed. None of the gods of the defeated peoples had been able to deliver them, had they? Sennacherib obviously granted the Lord no greater respect than the idols of the nations.

12] Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed; as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezep, and the children of Eden which *were* in Thelasar?

To reinforce his warning the Assyrian king mentioned 10 cities and nations, five of which had not been referred to previously. Gozan was located on the Habur River east of Haran, the town where Abraham lived for some time. Rezep was probably Rusafah (or Risafe) northeast of Palmyra and south of Haran. Eden was a small kingdom in the Euphrates basin west of the Balikh River, and Tel Assar was one of the cities in this area.

13] Where *is* the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah?

14] And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD.

When the king had received and read Sennacherib's message which had been carried to him by messengers (cf. v. 9) he returned to the temple to pray again (cf. v. 1). Spreading the letter before the LORD, Hezekiah addressed Him as Israel's God, whose throne was the "mercy seat," on the ark of the covenant. God had said He would dwell between ("in the midst of") the cherubim in a unique sense (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 1 Chr 13:6).

15] And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said, O LORD God of Israel, which dwellest *between* the cherubims, thou art the God, *even* thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth.

16] LORD, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, LORD, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God.

His prayer included a recognition of God's sovereignty (v. 15), mention of the defiance of the Assyrians (vv. 16-18), and a request for deliverance (v. 19). The king recognized that God is a Spirit, not a piece of wood or stone (cf. 2 Kings 19:18). He alone (cf. v. 19) was the real Ruler of Judah, the Sovereign over all the kingdoms of the earth including Assyria, and the all-powerful Creator of heaven and earth. Hezekiah besought God to listen carefully to what he would say and to view closely what was happening. He then reported Sennacherib's blasphemous insults.

17] Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands,
18] And have cast their gods into the fire: for they *were* no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them.

19] Now therefore, O LORD our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou *art* the LORD God, *even* thou only.

But Hezekiah appealed to the living God to deliver His people from Sennacherib's hand. Hezekiah believed He could; this was a prayer of faith. The objective of the king's petition was God's glory, not primarily his own survival. He asked God to vindicate Himself and to demonstrate that He was not just an impotent idol so that the whole world would acknowledge Him. Hezekiah's petition is one of the finest prayers in Scripture.

20] Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, *That* which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard.

The Lord's answer to Hezekiah's request (vv. 15-19) came through Isaiah, and was delivered to the king by a messenger. God assured Hezekiah that his prayer had been heard. God then announced a message of judgment against Sennacherib for his blasphemy.

21] This *is* the word that the LORD hath spoken concerning him; The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, *and* laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee.

The first part of God's answer (vv. 20-28) gave the reason for His judgment on Sennacherib. The figurative, poetic language was probably used to stress the importance and divine source of the answer. The Virgin Daughter of Zion suggests that Jerusalem had never been conquered since it had passed into Israelite control. Jerusalem would despise and mock Sennacherib, shaking her head as the Assyrian king fled from her.

22] Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted *thy* voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? *even* against the Holy *One* of Israel.

Sennacherib had raised his insulting voice in blasphemy and pride, not against the city but against her God, the Holy One of Israel. This was his great sin and his undoing. He and his messengers had insulted the Lord by claiming their victories were a result of their own might.

- 23] By thy messengers thou hast reproached the Lord, and hast said, With the multitude of my chariots I am come up to the height of the mountains, to the sides of Lebanon, and will cut down the tall cedar trees thereof, *and* the choice fir trees thereof: and I will enter into the lodgings of his borders, *and into* the forest of his Carmel.
- 24] I have digged and drunk strange waters, and with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of besieged places.

Sennacherib boasted that he had dug up many foreign lands and had taken for himself what satisfied him at their expense. He had done this to the Southern Kingdom of Judah, here referred to figuratively as Egypt.

- 25] Hast thou not heard long ago *how* I have done it, *and* of ancient times that I have formed it? now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste fenced cities *into* ruinous heaps.

Addressing Sennacherib in this prophecy, God said that king was not responsible for Assyria's success. Instead God had ordained planned, and brought to pass all that had happened (cf. Isa 10:5). The fortified cities were those the Assyrians had destroyed.

- 26] Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded; they were *as* the grass of the field, and *as* the green herb, *as* the grass on the housetops, and *as* corn blasted before it be grown up.
- 27] But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me.
- 28] Because thy rage against me and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.

The hook and the bridle, which portray catching a fish and controlling a horse, are uniquely appropriate. On some ancient monuments the Assyrian conquerors pictured themselves as leading their captives with a line that passed through rings that had been placed in the victims' noses. God promised to do to them as they had done to others. He would lead them back from where they had come and reduce them to their former humble state.

- 29] And this *shall be* a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof.

Through Isaiah God then promised Hezekiah a sign that these predictions (vv. 26, 28) would indeed come to pass. The sign was a near-future miracle that would confirm the fulfillment of the more distant aspects of the prophecy. For two years the people of Jerusalem would be able to eat the produce of their land. It would not be stolen by the Assyrians who would have lived off the land if they had returned to besiege the capital. The Judeans had not been able to plant crops outside the city walls because of the Assyrians' presence. But God promised that He would feed them for two years by causing the seed that had been sown naturally to grow up into an adequate crop. The third year people could return to their normal cycle of sowing and reaping.

- 30] And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall yet again take root downward, and bear fruit upward.
- 31] For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion: the zeal of the LORD *of hosts* shall do this.

This provision of multiplied food was further designed to illustrate God's plan to multiply miraculously the people of Judah who had been reduced to small numbers. Sennacherib claimed to have taken 200,150 prisoners from Judah. However, though Judah seemingly might cease to be a nation through attrition, God promised to revive it. Like the crops, a remnant of people would take root and bear fruit, that is, be established and prosperous. God's zeal on behalf of His people would perform this (cf. Isa 9:7).

- 32] Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it.

Sennacherib's fate was then revealed. He would not forcefully take Jerusalem, besiege it, or even shoot an arrow against it. [This is quite an audacious prophecy: among the 185,000 troops, just one trigger-happy archer could puncture this prediction!]

- 33] By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD.
- 34] For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.

God promised to defend Jerusalem and save it from Sennacherib's wrath. God would do this for two reasons: 1) the sake of His own reputation (cf. v. 19) and 2) because of His promise to His servant David (cf. 1 Kgs 11:13).

- 35] And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they *were* all dead corpses.

That very night while the Assyrian army lay sprawled across the Judean countryside the Angel of the LORD executed 185,000 of their soldiers. [Herodotus records an Egyptian tradition which may describe physical means God used to destroy Sennacherib's army: "Mice ate up the quivers." Presumably the mice came carrying bubonic plague. The plague, incubating in the soldiers, reached killing fever stage on the night when the city had been promised relief, and it slew them in their sleep. God orders events to coincide with his will. The event occurred after Rab-shakeh withdrew from Jerusalem and found Sennacherib at Libnah.]

- 36] So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh.

He fled to Nineveh because of possible action from Egypt. "Dwelt at Nineveh" indicates that he undertook no further campaigns to the west.¹

- 37] And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead.

Years later (in 681 B.C.) Sennacherib was worshipping in the temple of his god Nisroch. The temple was probably in Nineveh, Assyria's capital. There the king fell prey to the plot of assassins, two of his own sons. Ironically his god was not able to deliver him even in its temple. The murdering sons fled to the land of Armenia, about 300 miles north of Nineveh. Armenia is now divided between Russia, Turkey, and Iran. Another son, Esarhaddon (681-669 B.C.), succeeded Sennacherib as king. Esarhaddon states that his brothers slew Sennacherib in a plot to gain the throne.² Ashurbanipal (688-626 B.C.) states that he slew those who slew Sennacherib, his grandfather.³ Thus the word of the Lord (v. 7) came to pass.

2 Kings 20 Hezekiah's Illness

- 1] In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.

God added 15 years to Hezekiah's life in response to his petition for mercy (20:6). Hezekiah died in 686 B.C. which would place this incident in 701 B.C., the year of Sennacherib's invasion (cf. Isa. 38). Hezekiah's serious illness (with some kind of boil, v. 7) may or may not have been directly connected with the invasion by Sennacherib. God sent Isaiah to announce to Hezekiah that he would die. The prophet instructed him

to prepare for this by setting his house (affairs) in order. [The sentence of death rests upon each one of us: "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." Heb. 9:27. If we knew the date in advance, would it change the way we are living?]

- 2] Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying,
3] I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done *that which is* good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.

Hezekiah responded to this bad news by praying earnestly to the LORD. The king reminded God of his faithfulness to Him, his wholehearted devotion, and his good behavior as God's vice-regent. Compare Hezekiah's testimony in Isa 38:10-20. Hezekiah wanted time to establish his moral reforms more firmly among the people.

- 4] And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying,
5] Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD.

Hezekiah had behaved like a true son of David in the way he reacted to God's first message. Hezekiah's prayer (what he said) and his tears (how he felt about what he said) moved God to heal him. From Isa 38:17, 18 it appears that there was some reason why Hezekiah should be chastised, most probably because of shameful lack of faith under Sennacherib's first invasion, when Hezekiah made allies of the Arabs.⁴ At this point he was not a notable example of one who trusted and obeyed God. Isaiah announced that in three days the king would be well enough to worship God in the temple.

- 6] And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.

God promised to add 15 years to Hezekiah's life (from 701 to 686). The Lord also promised to deliver Hezekiah and Jerusalem from Sennacherib's siege and to defend Jerusalem for His own sake and for David's sake (cf. 19:34).

- 7] And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid *it* on the boil, and he recovered.

Isaiah then gave Hezekiah a treatment for his illness. The poultice of figs was well known in the ancient world as a means of helping to heal boils and ulcers, but Hezekiah's physicians had not prescribed it.

- 8] And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What *shall be* the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the LORD the third day?

For the natural sequence of events read the verses in this order—6, 8, 11, 7. Hezekiah desired an external or “second” witness to relieve his anxiety and strengthen his faith. God did not object to such a request if the sign were requested to strengthen the faith of the person seeking it. Signs were miracles that signified that what God had said He would indeed do. Perhaps the imminent danger that Hezekiah faced from Sennacherib led him to ask for this sign.

- 9] And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees?

God let the king choose whether the shadow would go forward, as it normally would, or backward. Ahaz’s stairway (v. 11) was evidently a stairway King Ahaz had built. It may have been constructed as a sundial to measure the time of day or it may have simply been a regular staircase used by God on this occasion to provide the sign Hezekiah had requested.

- 10] And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees.
11] And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the LORD: and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz.

It is not necessary to insist that God reversed the rotation of the earth to effect this miracle. Some similar miracles were evidently limited in their scope, being local rather than universal (cf. Ex 10:21-23; Josh 10:12-13). [Some may have heard of the “urban legend” of a missing day in the universe; 23 hours 20 minutes accounted for by Joshua 10; and the remainder here, etc. Nonsense. No substantiation, to my knowledge.] This following incident evidently took place shortly after Hezekiah recovered from his illness (cf. Isa 39:1-2).

- 12] At that time Berodachbaladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick.

Merodach-baladan (*Marduk-Apaliddin*) was twice king of Babylon (722–710, 703–702). He was dethroned the first time by Sargon about 710 B.C., but later regained the throne. The second time he was defeated and dethroned by Sennacherib, along with his ally Elam in his first campaign, 703 B.C.⁵ Merodach sought to make an ally of Hezekiah.⁶ He courted Hezekiah’s favor by sending a gift when he heard that Hezekiah had become sick. Merodach-Baladan also wanted to ask about the miracle that had occurred in the land (2 Chr 32:31). Hezekiah had not yet forsaken

his practice of making alliances. He was yet to do so before the second invasion, and thus to be a true man of faith.

- 13] And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and *all* the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not.

Hezekiah showed his Babylonian visitors the full extent of his wealth and armaments partly because he concluded his ally should know how much Judah would be able to contribute to their joint anti-Assyrian effort.

- 14] Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, *even* from Babylon.

Hezekiah made no attempt to hide what he had done from Isaiah who had been sent by God to inquire about the visitors. The king of Judah likely did not think that his desire to form an alliance with Babylon was either an expression of lack of confidence in God or a foolish move politically.

- 15] And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All *the things* that *are* in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them.
16] And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD.
17] Behold, the days come, that all that *is* in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD.
18] And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

Some of the royal family who had not yet been born would also be taken captive and be made eunuchs in the palace in Babylon. Eunuchs were often high-ranking officials.

- 19] Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good *is* the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken. And he said, *Is it not good*, if peace and truth be in my days?

Hezekiah ultimately repented of his pride (2 Chr 32:26) and humbly accepted the fact that God’s judgment would come on the nation. He was also grateful for the peace and security Judah would enjoy by God’s mercy in his lifetime.

- 20] And the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and all his might, and how he made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

The building of the tunnel from the Gihon spring to the Pool of Siloam was singled out by the writer as one of Hezekiah's more important achievements (cf. 2 Chr 32:30). Hezekiah had this 1,777-foot tunnel dug from the oldest source of water, just outside the wall of Jerusalem, under the wall to a reservoir inside the city. He then covered up the spring so the Assyrian invaders would not discover it and cut off Jerusalem's water supply. This tunnel, dug from both ends to the middle, was a remarkable engineering feat which still can be seen today.

21] And Hezekiah slept with his fathers: and Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.

Years before Hezekiah died he made his son Manasseh vice-regent in 697 B.C. The father and son ruled together until Hezekiah died in 686 B.C. Then Manasseh succeeded Hezekiah and ruled as sole king, the worst in the line of Judah. Though Manasseh reigned longer than any other king of Judah or Israel, the record of his reign is brief.

Maybe Hezekiah should have died when the time came for him to die. Three things took place after God extended his life that were foolish acts:

- 1) he showed his treasures to Babylon, which will cause great trouble in the future;
- 2) he begat a son, Manasseh, who was the most wicked of any king;
- 3) he revealed an arrogance, almost an impudence, in his later years. His heart became filled with pride.

But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem

2 Chronicles 32:25

While he ultimately repented of this pride (1 Chr 32:26), it might have been better if Hezekiah had died at God's appointed time.

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) What does Senecherib's siege teach us about angels?
- 2) Make a list of the kings of the Northern Kingdom and the primary contributions of each.
- 3) Make a list of the prophets God sent to warn the Northern Kingdom and the results of each.
- 4) List the primary reasons that the Northern Kingdom was destroyed by the Assyrians.

- 5) Explain the origin of the people called "Samaritans." Are they Jewish? If not, why not?
- 6) What were the major results of Hezekiah's extended 15 years?

Discussion Questions

("Where two people agree, one is redundant.")

- 1) What might have prevented the Northern Kingdom from its judgment?
- 2) What are the parallels and lessons for our culture today?
- 3) Was Hezekiah's extended life a blessing?
- 4) If we knew the date we were going to die, what changes would it bring to our lives? Why?
- 5) Are there *Nehustans* around us today?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Make a list, from the Scriptures, of the attributes of angels. Of demons. Contrast them.
- 2) Explore the origin of the sign of Aescalapius in the medical profession today.

Preparation for Next Session:

Read the remainder of 2 Kgs 21-25 and 2 Chr 29-32. Read Deut 27:15-28:68.

Notes:

1. Luckenbill, Annals of Sennacherib, p. 17.
2. Luckenbill, Anc. Rec., Vol. II, pars. 501, 592.
3. ibid., Vol. II, par. 795.
4. Luckenbill, Annals of Sennacherib, p. 33.
5. Luckenbill, Annals of Sennacherib, p. 24.
6. Josephus, Antiq. x. 2. 2.

Session 7 2 Kings 21 - 23

Manasseh's evil reign (21:1-18); Amon's evil reign (21:19-26); Josiah's good reign (22:1-23:30); Jehoahaz's evil reign (23:31-35); Jehoikim's evil reign (23:36-24:7).

2 Kings 21

Manasseh's Evil Reign

- 1] Manasseh *was* twelve years old when he began to reign, and reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name *was* Hephzibah.

When Manasseh was 12 years old he began ruling as vice-regent with his father Hezekiah (697 B.C.). In all he reigned 55 years.

- 2] And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel.

Rather than continuing the God-honoring policies of his father, Manasseh reverted to those of his grandfather Ahaz and reestablished the detestable practices of the native Canaanite peoples.

- 3] For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.

He also rebuilt the high places which had been so common in the nation until Hezekiah had purged the land of them (2 Kgs 18:4). Manasseh reerected altars to Baal and made a pole to represent Asherah (cf. 21:7) as Ahab had done in Samaria (1 Kgs 16:33).

- 4] And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD said, In Jerusalem will I put my name.
5] And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.
6] And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the LORD, to provoke *him* to anger.

Manasseh also practiced human sacrifice and offered one of his own sons to the Ammonite god Molech in the Valley of Hinnom (cf. 1 Kgs 11:7, 33; 2 Kgs 23:10, 13). Sorcery, divination, mediums, and spiritists were all part of Manasseh's religious system even though these were prohibited in the Mosaic Law. The king believed that all forms of worship were better for the people than the exclusive worship of Yahweh prescribed in the Law. His policies provoked the LORD to anger (cf. 21:15; 22:13, 17; 23:19, 26; 24:20) and were evil (cf. 21:2) in His eyes.

- 7] And he set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house, of which the LORD said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever:

Manasseh further desecrated the temple by placing in it the carved Asherah pole he had made (cf. v. 3). By so doing he gave an idol the place that God alone deserved.

- 8] Neither will I make the feet of Israel move any more out of the land which I gave their fathers; only if they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them.
9] But they hearkened not: and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the children of Israel.

Amazingly the people under Manasseh practiced more evil (cf. 2 Kings 21:15-16) *than the Canaanites before them*.

- 10] And the LORD spake by his servants the prophets, saying,
11] Because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations, *and* hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did, which *were* before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols:
12] Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Behold, *I am* bringing *such* evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle.
13] And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab: and I will wipe Jerusalem as *a man* wipeth a dish, wiping *it*, and turning *it* upside down.

He said He would stretch the straight plumb line (symbolizing destruction) against Jerusalem and Manasseh as He had done to Samaria and the house (family or dynasty) of Ahab.

- 14] And I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies;
15] Because they have done *that which was* evil in my sight, and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt, even unto this day.

This judgment would come on them for all their evil (cf. vv. 9, 16) since their birth as a nation when God led them out of Egypt.

- 16] Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD.

The innocent blood Manasseh shed included that of his own son (v. 6) and the sons and daughters of those who followed his examples of worship. According to Jewish tradition Isaiah was put to death by Manasseh by being sawed in two (Heb 11:37 may refer to Isaiah).

- 17] Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and all that he did, and his sin that he sinned, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

The chronicler reported that Manasseh for his sins was taken captive to Babylon (2 Chr 33:11) by the king of Assyria, probably Ashurbanipal (669-626 B.C.). There Manasseh repented of his sins and God in His grace allowed Manasseh to return to Jerusalem after a period of captivity (2 Chr 33:12-13; cf. 2 Chr 33:18-19). After his restoration the king cleaned up much of the idolatry in Judah (2 Chr 33:15-17). Manasseh's sins had stained Judah deeply, however, and even later reforms under Josiah could not avert God's judgment (2 Kgs 23:26).

- 18] And Manasseh slept with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza: and Amon his son reigned in his stead.
- 19] Amon *was* twenty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name *was* Meshullemeth, the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah.
- 20] And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh did.

Amon did not continue the policies of his father's later rule but reverted to the syncretistic, idolatrous worship that had characterized Manasseh's earlier reign (cf. vv. 2-7).

- 21] And he walked in all the way that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them:
- 22] And he forsook the LORD God of his fathers, and walked not in the way of the LORD.
- 23] And the servants of Amon conspired against him, and slew the king in his own house.
- 24] And the people of the land slew all them that had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead.

A popular uprising followed, however, in which Amon's murderers were brought to justice and executed. On Amon's death his son Josiah was placed on the throne.

- 25] Now the rest of the acts of Amon which he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?
- 26] And he was buried in his sepulchre in the garden of Uzza: and Josiah his son reigned in his stead.

Amon was buried with his father in the palace garden (cf. v. 18).

2 Kings 22

Josiah's Good Reign

- 1] Josiah *was* eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name *was* Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath.

Josiah was one of Judah's best kings. Peace, prosperity, and reform characterized his reign. Josiah was only a lad of eight when he was crowned king, and reigned over Judah 31 years (640-609 B.C.). During his reign world power passed from Assyrian to Babylonian leadership. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, was destroyed in 612 B.C., and the Assyrian Empire fell in 609.

- 2] And he did *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.

Like Asa and Hezekiah before him Josiah did what was right in the sight of the LORD and followed the good ways of his ancestor David. He did not deviate from this course at any time during his reign. The chronicler added that Josiah began to seek after the Lord when he was 16 and he began his religious reforms when he was 20 (2 Chr 34:3-7). Josiah was the fourth and final reformer among Judah's kings, following Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah. But Josiah's reforms were more extensive than those of any of his predecessors.

- 3] And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, *that* the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of the LORD, saying,

The temple had fallen into disrepair and had been desecrated by Manasseh who had built pagan altars and images in it (cf. 21:4-5, 7, 21). In Josiah's 18th year as king, at age 26, he began to repair the temple and restore it to its former condition. He sent the secretary, Shaphan (perhaps like a secretary of state) along with other high government officials (cf. 2 Chr 34:8) to begin the temple renovations. (It would be Shaphan's son, Ahikam, who would be sent to Huldah the Prophetess (vv. 12-20) and who would protect Jeremiah from being condemned to death (Jer 26:24). It would be Shaphan's grandson, Gedaliah, who would be appointed governor of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 39:14; 40:5).

- 4] Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people:
- 5] And let them deliver it into the hand of the doers of the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD: and let them give it to the doers of the work which *is* in the house of the LORD, to repair the breaches of the house,
- 6] Unto carpenters, and builders, and masons, and to buy timber and hewn stone to repair the house.
- 7] Howbeit there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully.

For some time money had been collected for this purpose. Now enough was in hand to begin the work.

- 8] And Hilkiyah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.

In the process of renovating the temple a copy of the Book of the Law (the *Torah*, the first five books of the Bible) was found. Evidently Manasseh or Amon had destroyed all the other copies so that the discovery of this one constituted an important find.

- 9] And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again, and said, Thy servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of them that do the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD.
- 10] And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiyah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.
- 11] And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes.

In distress Josiah tore his robes (cf. Gen 37:29, 34; Josh 7:6; 2 Kgs 5:7; 6:30; 11:14; 19:1; Es. 4:1; Job 1:20; 2:12) and wept (2 Kgs 22:19) on hearing what God required of His people as he compared that with how far they had departed from His will. They probably read Lev 26, or Deut 28: 15ff.

- 12] And the king commanded Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying,
- 13] Go ye, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great *is* the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.

Josiah feared the anger of the Lord and wanted to turn it away from all the people of Judah, not just himself. His shock at the contents of the Law reveals that Judah hadn't consulted the Law for a long time.

- 14] So Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her.

The fact that the king's officers (cf. v. 12) sought out the Prophetess Huldah suggests that she was highly regarded for her prophetic gift. But the fact that the five consulted Huldah suggests that the Ark of the Covenant was not available. We'll deal with this later.

- 15] And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me,

- 16] Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, *even* all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read:
- 17] Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched.
- 18] But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, *As touching* the words which thou hast heard;

This judgment would come because they had forsaken Him and made idols and burned incense to them. God's anger burned against His people (cf. v. 13) basically because they had forsaken His appointed way whereby they could experience blessing, enjoy life, and demonstrate to all other peoples how glorious it was to live under the Lord's leadership.

- 19] Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard *thee*, saith the LORD.

Josiah experienced God's mercy personally, because he had responded to God's Word and humbled himself before the LORD when he heard the Law.

- 20] Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.

God said that the king would die and be buried before judgment would descend on Judah. His death in 609 was four years before Nebuchadnezzar's first attack on Jerusalem in 605.

2 Kings 23

- 1] And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem.
- 2] And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD.

The king did not wait for the temple renovation to be completed before he called the assembly described here; this convocation took place soon after the Law was discovered. To this important temple ceremony he summoned all the elders the priests, and prophets (no doubt including Jeremiah and Zephaniah) and all the people from the least to the greatest. The king read all the words of the Book (esp. Deut 27:15-28:68).

- 3] And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all *their* heart and all *their* soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant.

He first pledged himself to follow the LORD faithfully and to carry out the words written in the Law of Moses (cf. 1 Kgs 2:3). Then all the people promised to do the same.

- 4] And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Bethel.

Josiah then removed everything connected with the worship of false gods that his ancestors had set up in Judah and Jerusalem. To desecrate the very center of pagan worship he took the ashes of these relics to Bethel.

- 5] And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven.

He also drove away the pagan priests who had led the people in various forms of idolatry. The Hebrew word rendered “pagan priests” מְרַאֲמִים, used elsewhere only in Hosea 10:5 and Zephaniah 1:4. It refers to idol-priests, priests who prostrated themselves before idols.

- 6] And he brought out the grove from the house of the LORD, without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and stamped *it* small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people.
- 7] And he brake down the houses of the sodomites, that *were* by the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the grove.
- 8] And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba, and brake down the high places of the gates that *were* in the entering in of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which *were* on a man’s left hand at the gate of the city.
- 9] Nevertheless the priests of the high places came not up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren.
- 10] And he defiled Topheth, which *is* in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech.
- 11] And he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entering in of the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathanmelech the chamberlain, which *was* in the suburbs, and burned the chariots of the sun with fire.

He also removed the sacred horses that were used in formal processions honoring the sun. These animals had been dedicated by the kings of Judah

(probably Ahaz, Manasseh, and Amon) and were stabled in the temple courtyard.

- 12] And the altars that *were* on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, did the king beat down, and brake *them* down from thence, and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron.

Ahaz had evidently built an upper room on one of the buildings at the gate of the temple. On the roof near that structure Ahaz had built altars, probably to the stars and planets (cf. Zeph 1:5; Jer 19:13; 32:29). Hezekiah undoubtedly destroyed these altars but apparently Manasseh or Amon had rebuilt them. Manasseh also had built altars in the temple courtyards (2 Kgs 21:5). All these Josiah destroyed and tossed into the Kidron Valley (cf. 23:6).

- 13] And the high places that *were* before Jerusalem, which *were* on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the king defile.
- 14] And he brake in pieces the images, and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men.
- 15] Moreover the altar that *was* at Bethel, *and* the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he brake down, and burned the high place, *and* stamped *it* small to powder, and burned the grove.
- 16] And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that *were* there in the mount, and sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned *them* upon the altar, and polluted it, according to the word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words.

To desecrate the site Josiah removed the bones of the people who had been buried in the tombs cut out of a hillside nearby and burned them on the altar (obviously before the altar was demolished). These bones probably belonged to the priests (cf. 1 Kgs 12:31-32) who out of reverence for the altar had been buried near it. This act fulfilled the prophecy of the man of God from Judah who had predicted it in the days of Jeroboam, even calling Josiah by name (1 Kgs 13:2-3).

- 17] Then he said, What title *is* that that I see? And the men of the city told him, *It is* the sepulchre of the man of God, which came from Judah, and proclaimed these things that thou hast done against the altar of Bethel.
- 18] And he said, Let him alone; let no man move his bones. So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet that came out of Samaria.

Learning that a certain tombstone marked the grave of the man of God from Judah who had predicted Josiah’s action (v.16), the king ordered

that his grave not be disturbed out of respect for him. The bones of the old prophet from Bethel who had been buried next to the younger prophet (1 Kgs 13:31-32) were left undisturbed too.

- 19] And all the houses also of the high places that *were* in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke *the LORD* to anger, Josiah took away, and did to them according to all the acts that he had done in Bethel.
- 20] And he slew all the priests of the high places that *were* there upon the altars, and burned men's bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem.
- 21] And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the LORD your God, as *it is* written in the book of this covenant.

Josiah did more than simply eliminate idolatry. He also reestablished the divinely ordained Passover feast. This important feast commemorated God's redemption of His people from their bondage in Egypt. It was also Israel's oldest feast.

- 22] Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah;

This observance by Josiah was conducted with more careful attention to the Law than any Passover since the days of the Judges. It also was unusual because people from both the kingdom of Judah and the old kingdom of Israel participated together (2 Chr 35:18).

- 23] But in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, *wherein* this passover was holden to the LORD in Jerusalem.
- 24] Moreover the *workers with* familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD.

Josiah's purge weeded out even the informal practitioners (mediums and spiritists; cf. 21:6) of rites God had condemned (Lev 20:27; Deut 18:9-12).

- 25] And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there *any* like him.

There was not a king before or after him who so conscientiously observed the Word of the LORD (cf. Deut. 6:5; Jer. 22:15-16).

Judah's Judgment

- 26] Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal.

Even Josiah's reformation, as great as it was, could not dispel the accumulated wrath of God against Judah for her years of rebellion, especially under Manasseh's leadership (cf. 22:16-17).

- 27] And the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there.

The Lord's words may be a direct quotation of a prophecy given through an unnamed prophet at that time, or a free quotation taken from God's previous words of warning. God would reject His people, their city, and His temple in the sense of handing them over to their enemies for discipline. To be removed from His presence (cf. 24:3, 20) meant being removed from the land (cf. 17:18, 20, 23). [Cf. the *Diaspora* beginning in 70 A.D.]

- 28] Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?
- 29] In his days Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and king Josiah went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him.

Josiah seems to have been motivated to fight Pharaoh Necho II (610-595 B.C.) of Egypt, possibly to regain the Ark of the Covenant which the Levites had relocated to protect it from the ravages of Manasseh. (Cf. 2 Chr 35:3). Pharaoh Necho was shocked, and apparently under the direction of the Lord: Cf. 2 Chr 35:20ff. Egypt and Assyria were allies and were trying to stop Babylonia from becoming the new world leader. As Pharaoh Necho marched his troops up the Mediterranean coastline in 609 B.C., Josiah headed northwest with his army, determined to stop Necho at Megiddo, a well-fortified stronghold in old Israel. Unfortunately for Judah, Josiah died in the ensuing battle.

- 30] And his servants carried him in a chariot dead from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own sepulchre. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and anointed him, and made him king in his father's stead.

His body was returned to Jerusalem where it was given a royal burial. Josiah was a strong influence for righteousness in his day and also a most capable ruler. The success of his sweeping reforms indicates that he had the ability to overcome strong popular opinion which undoubtedly opposed his convictions. His influence even extended into the territory of the fallen Northern Kingdom. Tragically his reign ended prematurely.

- 31] Jehoahaz *was* twenty and three years old when he began to reign; and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. And his mother's name *was* Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.

Josiah had 4 sons, 3 of whom ruled over Judah after their father's death. Jehoahaz was the middle son and was chosen by the people to succeed Josiah. He was 23 years old when he acceded, but he reigned only 3 months (in 609 B.C.). [His grandfather Jeremiah was not the prophet of the same name since that prophet was not permitted by God to marry (Jer 16:2).]

- 32] And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.
- 33] And Pharaoh Necho put him in bands at Riblah in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem; and put the land to a tribute of an hundred talents of silver, and a talent of gold.

When Pharaoh Necho defeated Josiah at Megiddo (cf. v. 29) Judah fell under Egyptian control. The Egyptian king later continued marching northward toward his encounter with Nabopolassar the Babylonian at Haran even farther north. Evidently Necho judged Jehoahaz to be an uncooperative vassal so he imprisoned him and sent him to Egypt (v. 34) where Jehoahaz eventually died (cf. Jer. 22:10-12).

- 34] And Pharaoh Necho made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the room of Josiah his father, and turned his name to Jehoiakim, and took Jehoahaz away: and he came to Egypt, and died there.
- 35] And Jehoiakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh; but he taxed the land to give the money according to the commandment of Pharaoh: he exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land, of every one according to his taxation, to give *it* unto Pharaoh Necho.

Necho then placed Jehoahaz's older brother Eliakim on the throne of Judah and changed his name to Jehoiakim (from "God has established" to "Yahweh has established"). The naming of a person was regarded in the ancient Near East as a sovereign prerogative; by doing this Necho was demonstrating that he controlled Judah.

- 36] Jehoiakim *was* twenty and five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name *was* Zebudah, the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah.
- 37] And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.

Addendum: The Mystery of the Ark of the Covenant

There are many theories concerning the destiny of the Ark of the Covenant. But many have overlooked this portion of the Biblical text that points to the only living tradition that still continues to this day. Although the judgment earned by Manasseh would come, Josiah personally would be spared witnessing it. (But why was Josiah obtain-

ing the Word of the Lord through Huldah, the prophetess, rather than through the Levites and the Ark of the Covenant?) The Levites had removed the Ark from the jurisdiction of Manasseh for safe-keeping. .

And [Josiah] said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, which were holy unto the LORD, "Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel did build; it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders: serve now the LORD your God, and his people Israel..."

2 Chronicles 35:3

It doesn't say that they complied. They had taken the Ark (and the Mercy Seat): Out of the Temple; Out of Jerusalem; Out of the jurisdiction of Manasseh...

After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by Euphrates: and Josiah went out against him. But he sent ambassadors to him, saying, "What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? I come not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war: for God commanded me to make haste: forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that he destroy thee not." Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth And the archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Have me away; for I am sore wounded.

2 Chronicles 35:20-23

Why did Josiah persist in attacking Pharaoh Necho? Why did Pharaoh Necho feel that he had God on his side? How could Pharaoh Necho have had instructions "from the mouth of God"? (Pharaoh Necho wasn't Egyptian: *He was Ethiopian*).¹

A Continuing Trust?

There is a 2400-year history of a sacred relic, guarded by the Ethiopians, from its tenure at Elephantine Island in Upper Egypt (642 B.C.); Tana Qirqos Island on Lake Tana (470 B.C.); to its present location in its compound at Axum. Protected until they deliver it to the Messiah when He rules at Mt. Zion...

A Documented Tradition

642 B.C. Elephantine Island, Egypt (Temple to YHWH served Jewish colony prior to Persian occupations of 525-404 B.C.²); 470 B.C. Tana Kirkos Island, Lake Tana, Ethiopia; 330 A.D. Axum; Presently at St Mary's of Zion church. A sacred trust, destined to be presented to the Messiah when He rules on Mt. Zion. Cf. Isa 18, Zeph 3:10, et al. See our briefing, *The Seat of Mercy* for a detailed discussion.

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) Who was the worst king in the Southern Kingdom? Why? What was the result?
- 2) Make a list of the “good” kings of the Southern Kingdom.
- 3) Make a list of the things God did to get His people from the worship of idols.
- 4) List the major positive things that Josiah accomplished.
- 5) What major power change occurred in Josiah’s reign? How was that significant?
- 6) Why did Josiah seek the counsel of Huldah the prophetess? Why was this unusual? List four prophets also around at that time.
- 7) Why did Josiah persist in taking up arms against Pharaoh Necho?

Discussion Questions

(“Where two people agree, one is redundant.”)

- 1) Why did Josiah succeed where others failed?
- 2) What does the record of Josiah’s reforms signify for *us* today?
- 3) Why did Pharaoh Necho believe that he was doing the will of God?
- 4) What is the significance of Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian Treasurer in Acts 8:26-39? How might it amplify this the present session ?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Explore the implications of 2 Chronicles 35:3. Trace the alternative theories of the subsequent whereabouts of the Ark of the Covenant.
- 2) Explore the distinctives of the Mercy Seat and its prophetic destiny.
- 3) What was the worst form of idol worship in history? What does “the Abomination of Desolation” mean? Why is it significant in a prophetic sense?

Preparation for Next Session:

Read 2 Kgs 24 & 25; 2 Chr 33-36; Study Jer 22:30; 25:11-12.

Things to ponder: Why was the Messiah to be born of a virgin? Explore the prophecy of 430 days in Ezekiel 4:1-7.

Notes:

1. Pulpit Commentary, Vol 6, p.436.
2. Elephantine, Official Guidebook.
3. German Institute of Archaeology, Cairo, 1998.

Session 8 2 Kings 24 & 25 The Babylonian Captivity of Judah

Judah existed as a separate kingdom from 931–586 B.C. Like Israel, Judah experienced national ups and downs. Spiritually, Judah was blessed with several godly kings. Of Judah’s 19 kings, Scripture marks out 8 as “good.” As we look at highlights of Judah’s history, the kings who struggled to lead Judah back to God, and the prophets God sent to warn His own, we learn more of the love of God—and more of that godly way of life that can bring blessing even today to you and to me.

2 Kings 24 The Twilight of the Southern Kingdom

Jehoiachin’s evil reign (24:8-17); Zedekiah’s evil reign (24:18-25:7); The Babylonian Captivity.

- 1] In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him.

Nebuchadnezzar had succeeded his father Nabopolassar as king of Babylon in 605 B.C. Earlier that year Nebuchadnezzar had led his father’s army against the Egyptians under Pharaoh Necho and had defeated them at Carchemish on the Euphrates River in northern Aramea. This battle established Babylonia as the strongest nation in the Near East. Egypt and its vassals, including Judah, passed under Babylonian control with this victory. He invaded the land of Judah later the same year (605 B.C.) in order to bring Judah securely under his rule. At that time he took some captives to Babylon including Daniel and others (cf. Dan. 1:1-3). Jehoiakim submitted to Nebuchadnezzar for three years, but then Jehoiakim revolted and unsuccessfully appealed to Egypt for help. He was eventually taken prisoner to Babylon (2 Chr 36:6), but apparently was released or escaped because he died in Jerusalem (Jer 22:19; cf. comments on 2 Kgs 24:10-11).

- 2] And the LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servants the prophets.

Judah was plagued by raiding bands from Babylonia, Aramea, Moab, and Ammon, who took advantage of Judah's weakened condition later in Jehoiakim's reign. God sent these enemies against Judah to punish her for her sins according to the words of the Prophets Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and others.

- 3] Surely at the commandment of the LORD came *this* upon Judah, to remove *them* out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did;
4] And also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the LORD would not pardon.
5] Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?
6] So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers: and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead.
7] And the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land: for the king of Babylon had taken from the river of Egypt unto the river Euphrates all that pertained to the king of Egypt.

Pharaoh Necho did not again assert himself to regain the territory he had lost to Nebuchadnezzar between the Wadi of Egypt (Wadi el-Arish) in the south to the Euphrates River in the north which included all of Palestine. This too was part of God's sovereign plan to discipline His people and illustrates the strength of Babylonia at this time.

- 8] Jehoiachin *was* eighteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. And his mother's name *was* Nehushta, the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem.

Jehoiachin began reigning when his father Jehoiakim died. He ruled Judah only three months while he was 18 years old and, like Jehoiakim, he did evil in the sight of the LORD.

- 9] And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done.
10] At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged.
11] And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, and his servants did besiege it.
12] And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers: and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign.

Nebuchadnezzar himself decided to go up against Jerusalem but by the time he arrived (in 597 B.C.) Jehoiakim had died and Jehoiachin had replaced him as king. Jehoiachin surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar along with the queen mother and all his attendants nobles, and officials. Nebuchadnezzar then took the king prisoner to Babylon.

- 13] And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had said.
14] And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, *even* ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land.

This invasion took place in fulfillment of God's Word (1 Kgs 9:6-9). Nebuchadnezzar also took captive virtually all the officers and 7,000 soldiers (v.16) as well as 1,000 craftsmen and artisans. In all, 10,000 people were taken captive including the Prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 1:1-3). Only the most poor people remained in Judah.

- 15] And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king's mother, and the king's wives, and his officers, and the mighty of the land, *those* carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Ration tablets from Babylon for Jehoiachin and five sons have been found.¹

- 16] And all the men of might, *even* seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, *all that were* strong *and* apt for war, even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon.

This was the second time Judahites had been deported to Babylon; the first deportation followed Nebuchadnezzar's victory in 605.

- 17] And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his father's brother king in his stead, and changed his name to Zedekiah.

None of Jehoiachin's sons sat on Judah's throne, as Jeremiah had predicted (Jer 22:30). The Babylonian king set up Jehoiachin's uncle Mattaniah as king. He was the third son of Josiah to rule Judah; he was the younger brother of Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim. Nebuchadnezzar exercised his sovereign prerogative and changed Mattaniah's name to Zedekiah. Though Zedekiah was king of the Southern Kingdom the people of Judah apparently did not recognize him as such at the time. This may have been due in part to his being placed on the throne by a foreign king (2 Chr 36:10-13). This explains why inscriptions from the time refer to Jehoiachin as Judah's last king.²

- 18] Zedekiah was twenty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.

Zedekiah was 21 years old when he began his rule, and he reigned 11 years (597-586 B.C.).

- 19] And he did *that which* was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done.
20] For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

2 Kings 25 Jerusalem's Final Siege

- 1] And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, *that* Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about.

In January 588 B.C. (in the 10th month of Zedekiah's ninth year) Nebuchadnezzar again marched against and besieged Jerusalem. The siege was lifted briefly when Egypt attacked Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 37:5) but the Babylonians defeated Judah's ally easily and resumed the siege.

- 2] And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah.
3] And on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land.
4] And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king's garden: (now the Chaldees were against the city round about:) and the king went the way toward the plain.

Finally the Babylonians broke through the wall of Jerusalem. This was on July 16, 586 B.C., the fourth month of Zedekiah's 11th year (vv. 2-3). The few remaining soldiers (cf. 24:16) fled by night through a gate in a section of the wall where it was double.

- 5] And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him.
6] So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him.

He was taken to Nebuchadnezzar's field headquarters at Riblah (cf. 2 Kgs 23:33) on the Orontes River north of Damascus. (Nebuchadnezzar was also conducting campaigns against Tyre and other Judean cities according to the Lachish Letters.³)

- 7] And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.

There Nebuchadnezzar killed Zedekiah's sons (to cut off the heirs to the throne) before his eyes, blinded Zedekiah (to make further rebellion virtually impossible), placed him in shackles, and transported him to Babylon (cf. Jer. 32:4; 34:1-3; 39). . . . precisely what Ezekiel had prophesied:

My net also will I spread upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare: and I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there.

Ezekiel 12:13

- 8] And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem:

Nebuchadnezzar sent Nebuzaradan, commander of his imperial guard, to burn Jerusalem. This was on the 7th day of the fifth month of Nebuchadnezzar's 19th year (August 16, 586 B.C.). However, Jeremiah 52:12 reads "the 10th day."

- 9] And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire.
10] And all the army of the Chaldees, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about.
11] Now the rest of the people that were left in the city, and the fugitives that fell away to the king of Babylon, with the remnant of the multitude, did Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carry away.
12] But the captain of the guard left of the poor of the land to be vinedressers and husbandmen.

Nebuzaradan also removed all but the poorest people, carrying the majority off to Babylon. Some of these captives had surrendered to the Babylonians but others had not. The remaining farmers were intended by Nebuchadnezzar to keep the land from growing completely wild.

- 13] And the pillars of brass that were in the house of the LORD, and the bases, and the brasen sea that was in the house of the LORD, did the Chaldees break in pieces, and carried the brass of them to Babylon.

The Babylonians broke the large bronze pillars and pieces of furniture in the temple area to make the bronze easier to transport.

- 14] And the pots, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the spoons, and all the vessels of brass wherewith they ministered, took they away.

15] And the firepans, and the bowls, *and* such things as *were* of gold, *in* gold, and of silver, *in* silver, the captain of the guard took away.

The smaller furnishings of bronze, gold, and silver were simply packed up and carted off to Babylon.

16] The two pillars, one sea, and the bases which Solomon had made for the house of the LORD; the brass of all these vessels was without weight.

17] The height of the one pillar *was* eighteen cubits, and the chapter upon it *was* brass: and the height of the chapter three cubits; and the wreathen work, and pomegranates upon the chapter round about, all of brass: and like unto these had the second pillar with wreathen work.

The two pillars on the temple porch were so huge that the amount of bronze in them could not be weighed (cf. 1 Kgs 7:15-22; Jer 52:20-23).

18] And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, and Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the door:

19] And out of the city he took an officer that was set over the men of war, and five men of them that were in the king's presence, which were found in the city, and the principal scribe of the host, which mustered the people of the land, and threescore men of the people of the land *that were* found in the city:

20] And Nebuzaradan captain of the guard took these, and brought them to the king of Babylon to Riblah:

21] And the king of Babylon smote them, and slew them at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was carried away out of their land.

22] And *as for* the people that remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, even over them he made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, ruler.

23] And when all the captains of the armies, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah governor, there came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, even Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan the son of Careah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah the son of a Maachathite, they and their men.

Since Gedaliah assumed a pro-Babylonian stance Nebuchadnezzar appointed him governor of Judah. Gedaliah set up his headquarters at Mizpah (about eight miles north of Jerusalem) since Jerusalem lay in ruins.

24] And Gedaliah sware to them, and to their men, and said unto them, Fear not to be the servants of the Chaldees: dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon; and it shall be well with you.

25] But it came to pass in the seventh month, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the seed royal, came, and ten men with him, and smote Gedaliah, that he died, and the Jews and the Chaldees that were with him at Mizpah.

Some time later, however, Ishmael, who was of royal descent and apparently wanted to govern Judah, conspired against Gedaliah and slew him (cf. Jer

41:2). Gedaliah had been warned of this possibility but had refused to take it seriously (Jer 40:13-16). Gedaliah's associates were also slain.

26] And all the people, both small and great, and the captains of the armies, arose, and came to Egypt: for they were afraid of the Chaldees.

Fearing reprisals from Nebuchadnezzar, all the Judahites including the army officers who had failed to prevent this assassination fled to Egypt for safety, forcing Jeremiah to go with them (Jer 41:1-43:7).

27] And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the seven and twentieth *day* of the month, *that* Evilmerodach king of Babylon in the year that he began to reign did lift up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison;

The 12th month of the 37th year of Jehoiachin's captivity in Babylon was March 560 B.C. (he was taken captive in 597; cf. 24:15). Earlier, in 562, a new king, Evil-Merodach, had become ruler of Babylon. He changed the former policy of treating the Judean king like a criminal and gave him privileges because he was a king.

28] And he spake kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that *were* with him in Babylon;

Jehoiachin was treated with greater respect than the other conquered kings who were also prisoners in Babylon. (This treatment may have been a result of Jehoiachin's repentance before the Lord, though such a change of heart is not mentioned in the text.)

29] And changed his prison garments: and he did eat bread continually before him all the days of his life.

30] And his allowance *was* a continual allowance given him of the king, a daily rate for every day, all the days of his life.

For the rest of his life Jehoiachin lived in minimum security prison conditions and ate regularly the food Evil-Merodach provided for him (cf. Jer 52:31-34).

The positive note on which 2 Kings ends reveals again the Lord's mercy, which stands out repeatedly in 1 and 2 Kings. This notation also points to the continuation of the Davidic dynasty which God had promised would lead His people forever (2 Sam 7:16). Evil-Merodach's attitude toward Jehoiachin was followed by policies that allowed the Israelites more freedom. When Cyrus overthrew Babylonia he allowed—in fact, encouraged—the Jews to return to their land (Ezra 1:1-4).

* * *

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) List the last five kings of the Southern Kingdom. Highlight the distinctions between Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Jeconiah, Coniah, Zedekiah, et al.
- 2) Explain the significance of the Battle of Carchemish.
- 3) Outline the three sieges of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and their respective impacts on the nation and Jerusalem.
- 4) List the principal prophets active during these times, and the major thrust of their messages.
- 5) Why was Gedaliah appointed governor of Judah?

Discussion Questions

(“Where two people agree, one is redundant.”)

- 1) What are principal lessons we can apply from the captivity of Judah in Babylon for 70 years? How was their history different from the Northern Kingdom, and why?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Construct a summary of Messianic prophecies that
 - a) have already been fulfilled;
 - b) which have yet to be fulfilled.
- 2) Investigate the “70 Week” prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27, its fulfillment in Luke 19, and its implications for Matthew 24.
- 3) Investigate and delineate the *four* 490 year periods of Israel’s history.

Preparation for Next Session:

Choose a new book to study.

Notes:

1. *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Dec., 1942, pp. 49-55.
2. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, p. 308.
3. D. Winton Thomas, ed., *Documents from Old Testament Times*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1958, pp. 212-7.

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About The Cover Design

(on the tape cassette volumes)

The “Front” cover:

The Greek border: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty (Revelation 1:8).” The center design element symbolizes the Word of God Incarnate, illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

The “Back” cover: (the “front” to the Jewish reader)

The Hebrew border: “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might (from the Sh’ma, Deut 6:4-5).”

The center design represents the Burning Bush, made up of Hebrew letters which proclaim “the Eternal One cannot lie.”

The Spine:

The spine includes a Menorah from the Old Testament, a Maranatha Dove suggesting the New Testament, and the Koinonia House logo at the base.



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